

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING A RADICAL EDUCATOR IN CAPITALISM TODAY

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Second Preface: Bringing Dead Texts to Life

Until now this was a dead text: a text that seemed doomed for non-publication, in any form. It was set to have become a Hillcole Group pamphlet. This never happened, for a number of reasons that I shall not go into here. Behind most of these reasons, however, was the fact that the icon of the Hillcole Group, Caroline Benn, had died in November 2000. For the final few years of her life, Caroline was the driving force behind most of the activities of the Hillcole Group (see Hillcole Group, 2001). As Mike Cole has noted, after Caroline joined the Hillcole Group in its early days her 'selflessness was to make a lasting impact on the ethos of the group' (2004, p.150).

This text's relevance has, in my view, not diminished in the four years since its main part, *The Importance of Being a Radical Educator in Capitalism Today* was first written (with a revised version of 20th March 2002 produced for the Hillcole Group pamphlet). New Labour has driven on the business takeover of schools and the points of attack have become more varied with the massive expansion of specialist schools and the further development of Academies – both with business sponsors. The strategy of *habituating* all those involved in school life (especially parents and school governors) to working with business partners is gaining strength. The seeming contradiction between business sponsors putting money *into* schools and businesses taking money *out* of schools through Private Finance Initiative (PFI) capital project schemes, outsourcing and local education authority management contracts is only an apparent contradiction. The sponsorship strategy is simply part of a process of getting all those involved in schools used to working with businesses and increasing their apparent dependency on them prior to a deepening and extension of forms of business involvement in schools that can generate substantial profits. It is part of a very long-term and softly, softly process of the commodification of educational services in England and the capitalisation of schools: turning educational services into profit-bearing activities. Some recent publications have charted these developments in the light of New Labour's Five Year Strategy for Education (DfES, 2004) and indicated the business risks regarding possibilities for substantial struggles against these policies (see Grant, 2005; and Rikowski, G. 2005).

But this picture of education policy under New Labour should be set in a broader canvas. The intensity and extensiveness of capital's invasion into all known areas of social life, including the commodification of knowledge itself and the transformation of intellectual property rights into tradable commodities (Rikowski, R 2005), bombards our senses and thought. Nowhere is safe; including the 'human' itself (see Rikowski, 2003).

What is most obvious from the above is that the need for a critical pedagogy becomes greater day by day. As Peter McLaren has argued:

Both critical pedagogy and multicultural education need to address themselves to the adaptive persistence of capitalism and to issues of capitalist imperialism and its specific manifestations of accumulative capacities through conquest (McLaren, 2005, p.89).

The new imperialism powerfully described by McLaren in his *Capitalists and Conquerors* (Ibid.) needs to be linked with the capitalisation and commercialisation of school life, and he has shown the way in this project. Dave Hill (2005) has indicated that the new imperialism together with a particular *form* of class warfare have never been linked more closely than today. Hill states that:

What we are seeing is *class war from above* - war by national and global capitalist classes against national and global working classes (p.1).

Hill goes on to explore some of the consequences of this conjuncture of the new imperialism with class warfare from above for the educational policy and practice. Two of his conclusions are that:

Books, Banks and Bullets combine in a permanent war to control our minds in support of the global project of imperialistic and militaristic neo-liberalism. Education policy is subordinated to and is part of the project of contemporary capital (2005, p.12).

Educators are on the frontline in this war: they are being implored, cajoled, and forced to take sides like never before by representatives of their capitalist states. In these circumstances, the importance of being a radical educator cannot be overemphasised.

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London, 20th July 2005

First Preface: The Transfiguration of Education in the Light of Capital

[And]...Jesus took with him Peter, James, and John, and led them up a high mountain, where they were alone. As they looked on, a change came over Jesus, and his clothes became shining white – whiter than anyone in the world could wash them. (St. Mark, 9:2-3, *The Transfiguration*, 1994, p.57)

Public services in the UK and the world over are being transfigured: their forms and functions are being radically altered as they are increasingly bathed in the light of capital. The education agenda of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), under its General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), is driving through the opening up of all public services to corporate capital, including education. In each public service in the UK, for example, there are specific mechanisms, or enablers and developers of the GATS imperatives for the breaking down of barriers to trade and the commodification of services. For schools in England, these GATS enablers include Ofsted (e.g. identifying 'failing' schools and local education authorities for transfer to private sector control), the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) for new capital projects, competitive tendering and outsourcing, and new types of school (e.g. City Academies backed by business cash). Furthermore, the recent Education Bill smoothes the way for the business takeover of schools, enabling the existence of federations of schools controlled by corporate capital. Collectively, these policies and mechanisms constitute the *national faces of the GATS* for schools in England (Rikowski, 2002). They are the mechanisms that consolidate nationally the purposes and drives of the GATS for schools in this country. Others, such as Anneliese Dodds (2002) and Alex Nunn (2002a-b), have explored the effects of the GATS for UK higher education.

However, the business takeover of schools is only one aspect of the marketisation, liberalisation and *capitalisation* of school life and education in general. Another aspect is the way that schools, and education across the sectors, are intimately involved in socially producing the single commodity upon which the whole capitalist system rests: *labour-power* – the capacity to labour. The distinction being made here is similar to Richard Hatcher's (2001) distinction between the business agenda *in* schools (the opening up of schools to business interests) and the business agenda *for* schools (schools as producers of labour-power for national competitiveness). This pamphlet focuses mainly on the latter, the business agenda *for* education (though the focus is not so narrowly on schools). This contrasts with an exploration of the business agenda *in* education that was at the centre of my previous Hillcole Group pamphlet, *The Battle in Seattle: Its significance for education* (Rikowski, 2001). Through the writings of Karl Marx, the principal article in the pamphlet, *The Importance of Being a Radical Left Educator in Capitalism Today*, examines the social production for labour-power in contemporary capitalism and explores the implications of the processes involved for being a *radical educator*. For me, a radical educator is an educator that links pedagogic processes and practices to a project of social transformation. The two are linked inextricably. Of course, as Dave Hill (2001) argues, an aspect of the neoliberal project in education is the "Suppression of oppositional critical thought and of autonomous thought and education" (p.38). It is this form of thought that was expressed collectively in our *Rethinking Education and*

Democracy (Hillcole Group, 1997), where we developed educational principles and values that run counter to the ruling educational ideas of today. Indeed, we argued strongly that there is a real need to 'universalise the capacity for critical enquiry' (see Hillcole Group, 1997, pp.23-25), and that 'education is where thinking about alternatives starts' (p.25).

This pamphlet consists of two papers, of very unequal lengths. The principal paper, *The Importance of Being a Radical Educator in Capitalism Today*, was first presented to the Department of Sociology at the University of Warwick on 24th May 2001, and revised and extended (in light of responses to the paper) on 30th May 2001. It was revised further on 20th March 2002. The paper is structured in the following way. After a section outlining value as the substance of capital's social universe, the living commodity that fuels the labour that creates this social universe – labour-power – is explored. A section follows this on education as a moment within the process of the social production of labour-power in capitalism. On the basis of these sections, the importance of being a radical educator in capitalism today is uncovered. The Concluding section argues for the centrality of education in the anti-capitalist struggles ahead.

The second, much smaller paper, *The B Generation*, was written on the morning of 1st May 2001 and distributed at the May Day Monopoly events in central London. This short paper relates the poverty of contemporary student life to the Government higher education student finance policies that have produced this impoverishment. The effects of the WTO's education agenda on the poverty of student life are also highlighted. Finally, there is a short Postscript that indicates some of the state repression tactics accompanying efforts to raise issues pertaining to the business takeover of all aspects of social life and the enforcement of the law of money across the globe.

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London, 26th March 2002

Acknowledgements

This is to acknowledge that Section 1 of *The Importance of Being a Radical Educator in Capitalism Today* is based on material previously published as 'Karl Marx's Social Universe', a section from the author's *Fuel for the Living Fire: Labour-Power!* a chapter in *The Labour Debate: An Investigation into the Theory and Reality of Capitalist Work* edited by Ana Dinerstein and Michael Neary, and published by Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2002.

Thanks to Catherine Lambert for her observations and comments on *The Importance of Being a Radical Educator in Capitalism Today*. Any faults and shortcomings in the following text are my responsibility.

An edited and substantially updated and restructured version of *The Importance of Being a Radical Educator in Capitalism Today* will appear in *Radical Library and Information Work: Issues and Ideas*, edited by John Pateman and Ruth Rikowski, to be published by Chandos Publishing (Oxford) in July 2006. See Chandos Publishing at: <http://www.chandospublishing.com>

The Importance of Being a Radical Educator In Capitalism Today

The essence of education is precisely the freedom to question, and to seek answers, whether it offends people's self-gratification or not. (Dave Hill, in Cole *et al*, 2001, *Red Chalk: on schooling, capitalism and politics*, p.66)

When I discuss globalisation with my students, I like to ask them the following question: "What is the price one pays to live in a truly 'free' and efficient market?" In other words, what is the price that one pays for not selling one's labour to a master? (Peter McLaren, in Cole *et al*, 2001, *Red Chalk: on schooling, capitalism and politics*, p.46)

... the goal of the economic system is the unhappiness of society. (Karl Marx, 1844, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts 1844*, p.26)

The logic of transnational capitalism now flagrantly guides educational policy and practice to such an extent that one could say without exaggeration that education has been reduced to a subsector of the economy. (Peter McLaren, in *Che Guevara, Paulo Friere, and the Pedagogy of Revolution*, 2000, p.169)

We can decide to approach the future by constantly putting our investment into a massive drive to encourage participation from everyone at every stage in life through education and training that will increase productive, social, cultural and environmental development *in ways we have not yet begun to contemplate*. (Hillcole Group, *Rethinking Education and Democracy*, 1997, pp.94-95 – my emphasis)

Introduction

I used to believe that being an educator, working in education, even within the 'cutting edge' environment of higher education was a backwater as far as struggles to transform capitalist society were concerned. The centres of action appeared to be the picket line, the factory and the housing estate and the myriad campaigns against state repression and for social equality. Schools, colleges and universities seemed to be small theatres when set against the massive amphitheatres on which momentous events such as the Miners Strike and the Anti-Poll Tax Riots of the 1980s were played out. Of course, in higher education the consolation of developing Marxist theory for sharpening up struggles beyond the academy and for providing penetrating analyses of events within education appeared to be a possibility. Yet when it came to Marxist educational theory this attempt at justifying a sojourn within higher education was seriously flawed. This was because the old Marxist theory flowing from Bowles and Gintis's (1976) *Schooling in Capitalist America* and Willis's (1977) *Learning to Labour* was underdeveloped, basically not 'Marxist' at all and of little use to those involved in struggles around education.¹ Worse, the functionalist undertones of Bowles and Gintis's (1976) classic work suggested that I was probably kidding myself if I thought that I was doing anything more than aiding the social reproduction of capitalism by collaborating in the development of human labour-power in my teaching in schools, colleges and universities.²

From the early 1990s, it became clear to me that my arguments and guilt feelings concerning

the marginalisation of education from the centre of anti-capitalist struggle and social transformation were erroneous and uncalled for. The weakness of these arguments rests on three points.

First, if Marxist educational theory was hopeless for informing and analysing educational institutions, developments and struggles then there was a need to start again, to take Marxist educational theory in new directions. I have argued for this many times previously (in Rikowski, 1995, 1996, 1997, 2000a, 2000d, 2001a; Cole, Hill, McLaren and Rikowski, 2001; and in McLaren and Rikowski, 2001).

Second, it became clear to me that as capital was everywhere – constituting a totality, a veritable social universe – then the class struggle was everywhere too: there was, and can be, no hiding place for capital, nor for labour as its constituting force. As the social domination of capital intensifies and deepens, and also extends (globalisation) no area of social life is left untouched. This includes, of course, education and training (Rikowski, 2000a, 2000c, 2000d, 2001b, 2002a) and the ‘human’ itself – the capitalisation of humanity that only a few Marxists want to contemplate (see Rikowski, 1999, 2000e, 2001a).

However, the third point is the most important. This is that education and training are involved in the social production of the unique, living commodity that provides the *substance* (value) of capital’s social universe: labour-power – the capacity to labour. Thus, education and training have a *strategic significance* for anti-capitalist struggles and social transformation. Teachers and other workers in all sectors and spheres of education and training have a particular form of social power at their disposal: the power to shape, develop and enhance the single commodity on which the whole capitalist system rests: labour-power. Furthermore, they are also strategically placed to *subvert* the smooth running of the social production of labour-power by inserting and developing principles that are antithetical to capitalist social existence: equality, social justice and freedom – all unattainable within capitalism (see Rikowski, 2000b, 2002a). Finally, the social transformations involved in moving from capitalism to socialism and beyond necessarily imply the development of labour-power not tied to the value-form of labour (i.e. unleashed from the production of value and surplus value). Thus, teachers and trainers have also the critical role of educating and training for *post-capitalist social existence and society*. On these considerations, working in education and training attains a new significance and shoots teachers and trainers in capitalism into the core of anti-capitalist struggle: contestation over the development of labour-power.

This paper seeks to generate urgency regarding development of Marxist educational theory given the strategic significance of education and training as institutions at the heart of the social production of labour-power in capitalism. It also uncovers the importance of being a radical educator in capitalism today. Radical educators are those who educate for the social transformation of capitalist society and a socialist future. For radical educators, education and anti-capitalism are fused indissolubly. A key point is that they promote and seek to develop what Paula Allman has called ‘revolutionary/transformational praxis’ within individuals, and this implies a radical pedagogy which generates ‘a critical, a dialectical, understanding of our present conditions’ (1999, p.58). Marxist educational theory uncovers the significance and necessity of radical education and the radical educator – as this paper makes clear. Marxism grounds the project of radical education.

If the analysis of this paper is sound, then radical educators – those educators driving forward society, facilitating its ‘real movement’, i.e. communism – are at the heart of social transformation. Furthermore, they have the crucial work of facilitating democratic and open forms of labour-power adequate to anti-capitalist struggle, social transformation and post-capitalist society. The

development of new, subversive and truly progressive forms of labour-power appropriate for labour in post-capitalist social life, and the development of anti-capitalist (and then post-capitalist) pedagogies is the prospect facing radical educators working for a form of social life against and beyond capitalism. It is this prospect and programme that the current role of teachers and trainers – now mainly as social producers of human capital, the form assumed by labour-power in capitalist society – can be measured and evaluated against.

A second strand emphasises *human resistance* to education for capital. Education and training are implicated in a process of reducing ‘the human’ to capital: human capital – the social form labour-power attains in capitalist society (Rikowski, 1999, 2000e, 2001b; McLaren and Rikowski, 2001). Thus, in resisting the social drives incorporated within capitalist education and training we simultaneously resist the reduction of our personhoods to a form of capital. But, of course, success in education and training are loosely connected to success in the labour market. This factor is the material basis for reformist educational politics and for personal trajectories of “self-improvement” through education and training. In this resides the succulent power of capitalist education and training to seduce us into embracing their agendas and taking on their modes of being. The stick is always in the background; refusal to employ, discriminating against Leftists in recruitment and redundancy and so on. In this way we are screwed-up: on the one hand capitalist education and training incorporate the drive to reduce us to human capital (the human as a form of capital); on the other hand they offer class and occupational mobility and the promises of consumption based on labour market triumphs.

One option is to reject capitalist education and training; just refuse to develop our own labour-powers. If capitalist education and training are mechanisms for the social reproduction of labour-power (after Bowles and Gintis, 1976), then why bother? Why not just reject capitalist education and training? Just ‘say no’ and refuse to become pawns as teachers, students or education administrators! However, this just consigns us to a life where periodic unemployment, relative poverty and various forms of debilitation haunt us.

Smarter is ‘critical success’ – where the subsumption of our labour-power under capital is only skin-deep. We can always critique capitalist education and training *from within*. However, this strategy is not risk free. Career risks flowing from the rejection of liberal Left values (e.g. that ‘equality’ is possible through ‘controlling’ capital and reforming capitalist institutions), and employer scepticism about our values and orientations as potential labour-powers, can be sources of concern. The problem with “critical success” in education institutions is that the more successful a person is, the less they tend to be critical of the constitution of capitalist society and its institutions and processes. There are always exceptions, of course. But the general trend is a warning for those seeking to change capitalist education and training as an aspect of socially transforming capitalism into socialism.

Of course, these are not the only personal responses to the fact that education and training are implicated in socially producing labour-power. Cole, Hill, McLaren and Rikowski in *Red Chalk: on schooling, capitalism and politics* (2001), and McLaren and Rikowski (2001) in *Pedagogy for Revolution against Education for Capital* (2001) illustrate some of the practical, political and career risks involved in being a radical educator today. However, the intensity and interest arising from “everyday life” as radical educator invariably outweigh these risks! On the one hand, radical educators (those educators advocating education as an aspect of anti-capitalist social transformation) are not self-sacrificing, super-moralisers who ditch their personal lives for the “common good”. On the other hand, radical educators can be viewed as living lives that are

personal expressions of the contradictory nature of human existence in capitalist society: but *everyone* is in this position. Why *particular* individuals become radical educators requires an explanation where the details of biography clash with the forces structuring the nature of 'the human' in capitalist society – issues addressed and uncovered in *Red Chalk* (Cole, Hill, McLaren and Rikowski, 2001) and Rikowski (2002b).

Finally, the paper is premised upon a particular form of Marxism. This is that Marxist science is the generation of theory *against* society (as critique of social forms in capitalist society). This can be contrasted to Marxism as a theory *of* society – Left social science as a Ptolemaic mapping exercise augmented with relating the apparently distinct 'parts' (institutions, organisations and individuals) through some mysterious notion such as "causality", a notion that the empiricist David Hume imploded in the eighteenth century. Marxism as a form of science that is against existing society highlights the weaknesses within capital's social domination, hence my interest in labour-power – capital's weakest link.

1. Neither Microscopes nor ‘Value Mountains’: value as social energy³

Labour is the living, form-giving fire; it is the transitoriness of things, their temporality, as their formation by living time. (Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, 1858, p.361)

The idea of a ‘social universe’ can be traced back to Moishe Postone’s ‘Time, Labor and Social Domination’ (p.259) and ultimately back to the social cosmology of Karl Marx’s *Doctoral Dissertation* of 1840 (Neary, 2000b). For both Postone and Marx, ‘social universe’ refers not to some abstract and a-historical ontological presuppositions underpinning the “social” but to a particular, historical form of social life. This is Karl Marx’s social universe: the *social universe of capital* that is the subject of the three volumes of Marx’s *Capital*, the *Grundrisse* and early works such as the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*.

The substance of capital’s social universe is value (Neary, 2000a; Neary and Rikowski, 2000; Rikowski, 2000c). Or, more specifically, capital’s existence rests on surplus value - i.e. value over-and-above that as represented by the value of labour-power that guarantees social reproduction of the worker (and is represented by the wage). Capital is value in motion (Kay and Mott, 1982). As John Holloway has noted, “capital moves” (1995) through its constant transformations into other forms of capital (money form, state form and so on) and also through its loops into the production of itself through further production cycles. The flows and movements of capital are simultaneously those of labour: labour moves too (Neary, 2000a). Firstly, on the basis of the generation of value and surplus-value in the labour process (so labour moves in the form of value, or as the value-form of itself) but also as the mediator of capital’s various transformations (Postone, 1996). Capital moves, but not of its own accord: the mental and physical capabilities of workers (labour-power) enable these movements through their expression in labour. The social universe of capital then is a universe of constant movement; it incorporates and generates a restlessness unparalleled in human history such that ‘All that is solid melts into air’ (Marx and Engels, 1848, p.83). Furthermore, the social universe of capital moves as a totality. It is set on a trajectory, the ‘trajectory of production’ as outlined by Moishe Postone (chapter 9, 1996). This trajectory is powered not simply by value but by the ‘constant *expansion* of surplus value’ (Postone, 1996, p.308 – my emphasis). The consequences of the particular form and direction of the movement of capital’s social universe are momentous and tragic:

The modern capitalist world, according to Marx, is constituted by labor, and this process of social constitution is such that people are controlled by what they make. Marx analyzes capital as the alienated form of historically constituted, species-general knowledge and skills and, hence, grasps its increasingly destructive movement toward boundlessness as a movement of objectified human capacities that have become independent of human control. (Postone, 1996, p.384)

The trajectory of capital’s social universe is based on a form of movement that forces it to continually crash against the limits of its own constitution and existence. It is movement out of control (Hudis, 2000). As Marx notes, ‘the goal of the economic system is the unhappiness of society’ (1844, p.26). The tragedy of labour is that this ‘destructive movement towards boundlessness’ rests on our skills, our knowledge and the transformation of our capacity to labour, our labour-power, into labour. The whole movement is powered by, and is dependent upon, our labour.

In its first incarnation in the capitalist labour process, value is incorporated within some material “things”, in commodities; though it can be created through the production of immaterial commodities too (Lazzarato, 1996; Dinerstein and Neary, 1998; Burford, 2000). Neither should value, as the substance of capital’s social universe, be viewed as some kind of ‘stuff’, some

material substratum. It is, after all, a *social* substance. As Marx noted in the *Preface to the First German Edition of Capital* (1867b): 'In the analysis of economic forms, ... neither microscopes nor chemical reagents are of use. The force of abstraction must replace both' (p.19). There are no 'value mountains' that we can observe in European Union 'value warehouses' either! Value can be viewed as being social energy that undergoes transformations: its first metamorphosis being its constitution as capital in the form of surplus value. As Ana Dinerstein (1997) notes, 'social energy is permanently being transformed' (p.83), and created too. Value is a 'multi-dimensional field of social energy: a social substance with a directional dynamic (expansion) but no social identity' (Neary and Rikowski, 2000, p.18). It is the 'matter and anti-matter of Marx's social universe' (*ibid.*).

Recent work by Michael Neary (2000b) has added significantly to our understanding of the cosmology of capital, the nature of capital's social universe. Neary notes that it is clear that Marx thought about his work cosmologically. Marx held that the law of value as delineated in his major work, *Capital*, was like the law of gravity. On Neary's analysis:

... the law of gravity to which he [Marx] was eluding was Newton's law. [And] what he could not know was that his elaboration of the law of value was in fact in advance of the science of the day and anticipated the revolutionary ways in which Einstein's theories of relativity and gravity recomposed our notions about the relationships between time, space, matter and energy. (Neary, 2000b, p.10, cf. chapter 3, *Theory and Relativity* in Neary, 1997).

The crucial point about gravity for Albert Einstein was that it was not a self-contained power but was constituted as a 'field of force' (Hey and Walters, 1997). The argument here is that value, within the social universe of capital, constitutes a social force field analogous to gravity as a force field within the known physical universe. Neary indicates that:

For Einstein, gravity is not force acting between bodies. It is an energy field created by matter, itself the result of the distortion of time and space affected by the intensification of the density of frozen quantities of matter. These distortions create paths along which movement occurs and also the way in which matter in that movement maintains itself in a solid state. (Neary, 2000b, p.11)

Following the argument through, value is a social energy field whose effects as a social force are mediated by the movements of capital (in its various forms) and the social relations between labour and capital. These latter, their movements in fact, condition the social distortions within capital's social universe, its constant disruptions and perturbations.

Social phenomena within capital's social universe are neither self-sustaining nor constitute stable entities. Furthermore, the social energy field (value) is constantly at risk of implosion. We ensure its maintenance. This is the tragedy of our existence within capital's social universe. For although value is the substance constituting the social universe of capital it is not self-generating. It cannot create itself, nor can it morph into capital on its own accord. It is labour (Marx, 1867a) that creates value and mediates its various transformations (Postone, 1996), firstly into capital on the basis of surplus value, and then the myriad forms of capital springing from surplus value. Thus: the existence of the substance (value as social energy) that constitutes capital's social universe depends upon our labour. As Harry Cleaver notes:

Capital can never win, totally once and for all. It must tolerate the continued existence of an alien subjectivity which constantly threatens to destroy it. (Cleaver in Neary, 1997, p.25)

Labour, in turn, is dependent upon our capacity to labour: the energy, skills, knowledge, physical and personal qualities that we, as labourers, possess. In sum, the activity of our labour (in conjunction with means of production and raw materials) rests upon our *capacity* to labour: our labour-power. Labour-power, the capacity to labour (or labour capacity) is the primordial form of

social energy within capital's social universe. It is the form of social energy that is the starting point for a whole series of transformations into labour, value, and capital (including its various forms) – indeed the social energy that powers social life as we know it. Labour-power, when transformed into labour in the capitalist labour process, has the capacity to generate value and, at a certain point (when value to equal to the social reproduction of the labourer is attained, as represented in the wage), *surplus value* – the first form and life-blood of capital. Marx's makes this clear in the *Grundrisse* when he notes that:

What the free worker sells is always nothing more than a specific, particular measure of *force-expenditure*; labour capacity as a totality is greater than every particular expenditure. (Marx, 1858, p.464 – my emphasis)

Although value is the substance of capital's social universe, it is labour-power expended in the form of *abstract labour* (labour independent of its particular and specific qualities, i.e. its use value aspect) that is the substance of value. For Marx, abstract labour is not a particular type of labour distinct from observable, concrete labour. Labours don't do a bit of concrete labour, and then do some 'abstract' labour! There is no temporal duality involved. Rather, the singular labour expended within the capitalist labour process is expressed in a dual mode: it is simultaneously concrete labour (the qualitative, use value aspect of labour), and abstract labour (the quantitative, value aspect of labour). The social constitution of abstract labour – the processes and transformations that condition labour in the capitalist labour process as incorporating an abstract aspect – rest on an analysis of socially necessary labour time. This analysis is not pursued here (for more see Neary, 1997; Neary, 2000a, 2000b; Neary and Taylor, 1998; Neary and Rikowski, 2000). The key point is that abstract labour is a 'real abstraction'; it is not a mental generalisation. Labour in capitalist society has an abstract aspect and is expressed as such (i.e. abstractly, as well as concretely). On this basis, Marx argues that:

The substance of value is and remains nothing more than expended labour-power – labour independent of its particular useful character – and value production is nothing but the process of this expenditure. (Marx, 1878, p.462)

Value's substance is labour-power, and the fact that labour-power resides within the personhoods of labourers, and is therefore under the sway of potentially hostile wills (a hostility fuelled by the antagonism between labour and capital), marks labour-power as *capital's weakest link*. Labour-power has to be coaxed, cajoled, manipulated or *forced* (sometimes accompanied by the threat or use of violence – symbolic or physical) into existence, i.e. transformed into labour by representatives of capital. Separation of the labourer from ownership of the means of production plays a crucial role in the enforcement of labour within capitalist society. This separation makes us socially dependent on capitalist work. As Marx notes:

... the labourer must be ... *compelled* to work in excess of the [necessary] time, and this compulsion is exerted by capital. (Marx, 1863b, p.406 – original emphasis)

For surplus value to emerge, workers must be forced to produce more value than covers their subsistence that defines socially necessary labour. The existence of the social universe of capital and its maintenance and expansion rests on our creative powers being expressed as a social force that is compelled to flow, as labour for value-generation. But there is a sting in the tale.

Tragically, the worker's labour-power, her creative force that is transformed into actual labour within the labour process, and that rests upon acts of will or consent (however minimal), produces value and then surplus value that assumes mastery over labour-power and its possessor – the labourer. Labour-power as a social force that is expended in the process of value-production is

then dominated by its own creation, and as labour-power flows throughout personhood this form of domination becomes the *domination of individual workers, and indeed all workers, by capital*. Viewed in this light, labour-power, despite its fantastic creative powers when energised in capitalist production, becomes an abominable commodity: it is the social force that generates its own master – capital. This is made clear by Marx:

For not only has he [the worker] produced the conditions of necessary labour as conditions belonging to capital; but also the value-creating possibility, the realization [*Verwertung*] which lies as a possibility within him, now likewise exists as surplus value, surplus product, in a word as *capital*, as *master over living labour capacity*, as *value endowed with its own might and will*, confronting him in his abstract, objectless, purely subjective poverty. (Marx, 1858, p.453 – my emphases)

Our creation (surplus value) haunts and dominates us, whilst the commodities that incorporate value constitute the vast wealth and mass of consumer products in contemporary society. The following section examines labour-power, the most abominable commodity in capitalist society.

2. The Abominable Commodity: Labour-Power – capital's weakest link

The whole system of capitalist production is based on the fact that the workman sells his labour-power as a commodity. (Karl Marx, *Capital – volume 1*, 1867a, p.405)

Instead of *labour*, Ricardo should have discussed labour-power. But had he done so, *capital* would also have been revealed as the material conditions of labour, confronting the labourer as a power that had acquired an independent existence and capital would at once have been revealed as a *definite social relationship*. (Karl Marx, 1863b, *Theories of Surplus Value – Part Two*, p.400 – Marx's emphases)

The expenditure of labour-power, its transformation into labour in the capitalist labour process, is 'the substance of value' (Marx, 1878, p.462). Value is the substance of capital's social universe. Labour-power drives production in capitalist society, for: 'Productive activity, if we leave out of sight its special form viz. the useful character of the labour, is nothing but the expenditure of human labour-power' (Marx, 1867a p.51). Labour-power is a fantastic, living commodity with a very special feature; it is 'a commodity, whose *use-value* possesses the peculiar property of being a *source of value*, whose actual *consumption*, therefore, is itself an embodiment of labour, and consequently, a creation of value' (Marx, 1867a, p.164 – original emphases). The capitalist 'buys labour-power in order to use it' (Marx, 1865a, p.173), and the worker 'sell rights to *control* his labour-power in exchange for necessary means of subsistence' that are purchased by the wage (which represents the value of labour-power) (Marx, 1866, p.1060). In the labour process, labour-power expenditure can create value over-and-above its own value, value in excess of that represented in the wage: surplus value. The wage only *appears* to represent the full extent of value creation.

The magical quality of labour-power's use value for representatives of capital is therefore critical: it creates 'more value in its consumption than it possesses itself, and than it costs' (Marx, 1865a, p.351). The quality of labour-power, therefore, is important as the higher the quality of labour-power the more value is yielded up in production (*ceteris paribus*) – placing a premium on the recruitment process as the employers' clearing house for labour-power (Rikowski, 1990, 1992, 2000a). Labour-power is the productive equivalent of the alchemists' philosopher's stone (though the efficacy varies), and it is purchased as 'a capacity for creating value' (Marx, 1865a, p. 381). But there are some snags. First, this wondrous commodity is not some sparkling but inert thing that can be easily controlled, for:

The use value which the worker has to offer to the capitalist, which he has to offer to others in general, is not materialised in a product, does not exist apart from him at all, thus exists not really, but only in potentiality, as his capacity. (Marx, 1858, p.267)

Labour-power exists within the personhood of the labourer, a point that shall be elaborated on later. Second, the actual use of labour-power, labour, 'can only be realised in the labour process' (Marx, 1878, p.118) and this involves the messy business of capitalist production. To create value, capitalist enterprises must embark upon commodity production, as this is the social form through which the transformation of labour-power into labour (with specific means of production and raw materials) creates value. The capitalist labour process is simultaneously a production process (of use values, useful 'things') and valorisation process (creation of value), and the resultant commodities incorporate value. Capital attempts to escape its own form of production. Phenomena such as increased turnover time (speeding up cycles of production), the flight of capital to ever new social and geographical spaces (globalisation) to evade known limits and the 'immaterial' production of the 'dot.com revolution' can all be viewed as attempts by capital to avoid its productive phase. But this is impossible: capital is always forced back onto its dependency on labour and labour-power that generates its substance.

Having fixed the centrality of labour-power to the social existence, maintenance and expansion of capital, it is essential to enquire into its nature and constitution. For the development of Marxist educational theory this is crucial. This paper stakes out a case, advanced previously (in Rikowski, 1990, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1999, 2000a, and 2000d), that labour-power is the **starting point** for Marxist educational theory.⁴ What, then, are the most significant features of this most abominable yet totally amazing commodity?

That Other Great Class of Commodities

The first point to note, a point at which many liberal Left critics of contemporary education⁵ typically recoil from the perspectives expressed here, is that labour-power is a commodity. Marx is most insistent on this. Labour-power is a commodity notes Marx, in the first volume of *Capital* (1867a, p.188). Its activity produces more value than it has incorporated within it (*Ibid.*). This is why the capitalist buys this precious, living commodity. To ram home the point, Marx argued strongly in *Wage-labour and Capital*, that:

Labour power ... is a commodity, neither more nor less than sugar. The former is measured by the clock, the latter by the scales. (Marx, 1847, p.152)

However, though forceful, Marx here oversimplifies, as we shall discover. If labour-power is a commodity, what then is a commodity? Marx defines a commodity in the following way:

A commodity is, in the first place, an object outside us, a thing that by its properties satisfies human wants of some sort or another. (1867a, p.43)

The problem with this definition is that labour-power is a commodity that is *not* 'an object outside us'. It is not an 'object' at all, and is *internal* to and flows throughout our personhood. This consideration leads Marx to discern two categories of commodity: the general class of commodities produced by transforming labour-power into labour, and the unique 'class of one' – labour-power itself. Marx starts to make this distinction in the following characterisation of the commodity:

A commodity - as distinguished from labour-power itself - is a material thing confronting man, a thing of a certain utility for him in which a definite quantity of labour is fixed or materialised. (1863a, p.164)

In *Theories of Surplus Value – Part One* (1863a), Marx makes a sharper break between the two great classes of commodities. He notes that:

The whole world of "commodities" can be divided into two great parts. First, labour power; second, commodities as distinct from labour power itself. Marx, 1863a, p.167)

Marx reiterates the point further on in *Theories of Surplus Value – Part One*, where 'the world of commodities is divided into two great categories: On the one side, labour-power. On the other side, commodities themselves' (1863a p.171).

The significance of this is that in his great work *Capital*, Marx starts out on his analysis from the general class of commodities *only*. He proceeds from the commodity as it is the 'economic cell-form' Marx, 1867b) of capitalist society. However, it should be noted that the commodity he has in view here is the 'general class', and that the analysis and critique of capitalist society requires a complementary exploration of 'that other great class of commodities': labour-power. Thus, the argument that labour-power is the starting point for Marxist educational theory constitutes an implicit acknowledgement that the project of articulating this 'second critique' extends Marxist theory significantly. Recognition of the 'two great classes of commodities' has implications for Marxist class analysis too, not explored here.⁶

Labour-Power Defined and its Conditions of Sale

The second point to note is that Marx formally defines labour-power and its conditions of sale. Very generally, for Marx, labour-power is our capacity to labour, our 'purposively active *capacity for labour*' (1866, p.981). Even in this brief characterisation, Marx stresses the active, will-determined nature of labour-power: acts of will form the basis of the worker's organisation of her/his personal attributes for effective labour. This point applies to Marx's formal definition of labour-power too:

By labour-power or capacity for labour is to be understood the *aggregate* of those *mental* and *physical* capabilities existing in a human being, which he exercises whenever he produces a *use-value* of any description. (1867a p.164 – original emphases)

Here we have an active conception of labour-power that focuses on the worker's organisation of her or his labour-power attributes (the various skills, abilities, personal qualities and physical powers) for the effective performance of labour in the labour process. It should be noted that this definition is a transhistorical, general definition of labour-power that applies to all social formations (likewise Marx's initial characterisation of the labour process in the first volume of *Capital*). This definition requires historical specification; it must be reconfigured within the context of capitalist society (likewise, as Marx goes on to analyse the specifically *capitalist* labour process in the first volume of *Capital*), as a particular social form, as *labour-power in capitalism*. In particular capitalist labour processes, labour-power attributes need to be brought together, organised by workers, as an act of self-organisation and orientation, and capital depends on this occurring – in relation to individual workers, worker collectivities (within and throughout enterprises) and throughout the totality of capitalist production. Furthermore, it is clear also that labour-power flows throughout personhood; it is not some 'thing' that is within the person and located within a particular part of the body, but is an active (individual) force that is socialised (becomes social) through its expression in commodity production. The key point is what is included in 'mental' capabilities: is this just 'skills', particular forms of knowledge and physical attributes and abilities?

Summarising what I have argued elsewhere (1900, 2001a), the 'mental capabilities' incorporated within labour-power include not just the usual suspects (skills, types of knowledge and so on) but also attitudes and personality traits. This is so for two main reasons. First, recruitment studies of young workers have shown that employers place work attitudes at the forefront of their recruitment strategies and criteria (Rikowski, 1992). The recruitment process is where the relative quality of job applicants as potential and actual labour-power is assessed and judged. Thus, empirically, as life is constituted on the surface of society, work attitudes and personality traits appear to figure practically in employers' deliberations on labour-power quality. Although the fact that work attitudes in particular are highly valued by employers is much commented on in the literature on the recruitment process (Rikowski, 1990), is it not *explained*. There is a kind of 'stand back in amazement' attitude on the part of researchers and analysts. However this point, and its explanation, rests on a second and more fundamental point; that 'work attitudes' and 'personality traits' are built into Marx's definition of labour-power. It is the will-determined element of his formal definition above that guarantees their inclusion and incorporation within labour-power. Marx emphasises the 'purposive nature of the labour expended' (1865a, p.28). Workers have to organise their personal powers and attributes as labour-power, and these acts of will indicate that labour-power is an aspect of 'personality': it is intimately linked to the personhood of the labourer. Thus, all kinds of social skills and attitudes, work attitudes and personality traits can be incorporated within

labour-power 'whenever the worker produces a use-value of any description' (Marx). As Peter McLaren notes:

...when employers assess labour power, they are referring to 'mental capacities' that includes work attitudes, social attitudes and personality traits – aspects of our 'personalities' (2001, p.6).

This is to be expected on the basis of Marx's formal definition of labour-power, and its explanation flows from the will-determined character of labour-power. As I have indicated elsewhere (Rikowski, 1999, 2002a) the will of the labourer is never completely subsumed under labour-power. This is because labour-power is a fundamentally unstable phenomenon (that generates instability within the totality of the person on this basis). This instability arises from contradictions within it that are related to the aspects it must incorporate on the basis of its relation to forms of value, and its relation to forms of labour in and against *capital*. These considerations, which we cannot go into here (explored in Rikowski, 2002a), ensure that 'the human' never becomes an automaton, producing exactly to the specifications of capital, as these 'specifications', the labour-power 'needs of industry', are contradictory. Hence, educators could not provide employers with what they 'need' regarding labour-power as these needs are necessarily contradictory and the expression of these in various 'needs statements' necessarily confused, yielding 'confused employer syndrome'. It is not that education is failing regarding 'meeting the (labour-power) needs of industry'; these cannot be met in principle (Rikowski, 2001a, pp.45-46).

As well as providing a formal definition of labour-power, Marx also provides an outline of its conditions of sale as a commodity. These are that:

1. The possessor of labour-power must sell his labour-power as a commodity.
2. The seller must own his capacity for labour i.e. his person.
3. The labourer sells labour-power only for a *definite period* (otherwise he would be a slave); he would no longer be an owner of a commodity but a commodity himself. Labour-power is his (the worker's) property, his own commodity.
4. From the owner of money's point of view, the labourer must be *obliged* to sell his commodity, his labour-power – (though why he presents himself to the money-owner is of no importance). (From Marx, 1867a, p.164-166)

The third point is particularly important for Marx. It must be stressed that the worker does not 'sell herself' for the duration of her life – that would entail labour-power taking on the social form given by societies resting primarily on slave labour. Rather, the worker 'sells a temporary disposition over his labouring capacity' (Marx, 1858, p.293). In capitalist society, the labourer is not tied to a particular capitalist; she can strike up deals to expend labour-power for a number of capitalist enterprises. However, over the lifetime of a worker, there is a kind of serial *wage-slavery* involved: the dependence of labour on 'capital in general' and on the money form of capital for sustaining life and soul. As Marx notes:

What he exchanges for capital is his entire labouring capacity, which he spends, say, in 20 years. Instead of paying for it in a lump sum, capital pays him in small doses, as he places it at capital's disposal, say weekly. (Marx, 1858, p.294)

Of course, 'the capitalist' in contemporary society is a 'serial capitalist' as we change jobs or occupations within the same firm or between different enterprises. As Marx noted, well before the notions of lifelong learning and globalisation were feted in academic circles:

The more highly capitalist production is developed in a country, the greater the demand will be for the versatility in labour-power, the more indifferent the worker will be towards the specific content of his work and the more fluid will be the movements of capital from one sphere of production to the next.

(1866, p.1014)

Lifelong labour meets lifelong learning: as we expend labour-power over a lifetime we simultaneously develop it, and this involves learning on a continuous basis – a kind of ‘learning unto death’.

One of the intriguing aspects of Marx’s formal definition of labour-power is that it appears only to exist within the labour process when producing use values. Does this mean, then, that it either flits in and out of social existence, or that it has some form of virtual existence when not transformed into labour in the labour process? The following sub-section explores the forms of existence of labour-power.

Labour Power’s Social Existence: real and potential (virtual)

The first and most obvious, but critical, point to note is that labour-power exists within ‘the bodiliness of the worker’ (Marx, 1858, p.298). For ‘the use value which he [the worker] offers exists only as an ability, a capacity [*Vermogen*] of his bodily existence; it has no existence apart from that’ (Marx, 1858, p.282), and ‘The labouring power of a man exists only in his living individuality’ (Marx, 1865b, p.56). Thus, labour-power exists as a commodity in the vitality of the worker (Marx, 1858, p.323); it is inseparable from, and intimately related to, the person of the labourer, to her bodily life force. However, labour-power has a double form of social existence: as a real, actual phenomenon and as potentiality, designating a virtual existence. This duality corresponds to labour-power as it is situated within the labour market and within the labour process.

Within the labour market, when not being transformed into labour, labour-power exists as a *capacity* – the capacity to labour. As non-active labour-power, therefore, it exists as potential, as possibility of existence in its transformation into labour, for as Marx notes:

As against capital, labour is the merely abstract form, the mere possibility of value-positing activity, which exists only as a capacity, as a resource in the bodiliness of the worker. (Marx, 1858, p.298)

Hence, within the labour market, labour is a ‘mere possibility of value-positing activity’ and labour-power also takes on this form of social existence: as potentiality, existing in virtual form, as a ‘resource in the bodiliness of the worker’. Labour and labour-power, in the labour market, exist as a fused social form: labour exists merely as the *capacity to labour*, that is, as *labour-power*.

In the labour process, labour-power attains *real social existence*, and Marx’s formal definition of labour-power inserted above recognises this. For Marx:

Labour power, however, *becomes a reality only by its exercise*; its sets itself in action only by working. (1867a, p.167 – my emphasis)

And labour-power, therefore...

...becomes a *reality* only when it has been solicited by capital, is set in motion, since activity without object is nothing, or, at the most, mental activity, which is not the question at issue here. (Marx, 1858, p.267)

Labour-power becomes a real phenomenon, has actual social existence, only within the labour process when it is ‘set in motion’ as an aggregation of mental and physical capabilities channelled towards the production of a use value, that, in capitalist society, involves simultaneously the generation of *value*. Marx brings the two forms of existence of labour-power together to make his position on its social existence clear:

So does labour-power preserve its property of producing value only so long as it is employed and materialised in the labour process; yet this does not argue against the fact that it is potentially, as a power, an activity which creates value, and that as such it does not spring from the process of production, but rather antecedes it... (1865a, p.381)

Labour-power exists in capitalist society as a living value-producing 'machine', but exists as labouring potential within the labour market prior to its incorporation within the lair of capital, the labour process.

Labour-power, then, exists within the personhood of the labourer. It is a living, human commodity that the worker sells to a capitalist for definite period of time for a wage that represents its value, and with many such sales over a lifetime. Labour-power has a dual existence: as labour potential (a virtual reality) within the labour market, and real social existence within the labour process when it is transformed into labour. It is this strange commodity that education and training in contemporary society are charged with socially 'producing'. Schools, colleges, universities and training organisations and institutions are intimately involved in the *social production of labour-power in capitalism*. This is clear in education policy documents when education and training institutions are urged to produce higher quality 'human capital'. Human capital is the social form labour-power takes on in capitalist society. This point requires elaboration, for a lot depends on it.

Five Theses on Labour-power as Human Capital in Contemporary Society: the horror within

As noted earlier, Marx's initial, formal definition of labour-power in *Capital* (1867a, p.164) was a general, transhistorical definition. It is necessary to enquire into the historical, *social form* of labour-power in *capitalism*. However, when this issue is explored the upshot is that it becomes clear that the social production of labour-power in capitalism through education and training does not just involve the production of the capitalist form of labour-power, human capital, but also implies the *capitalisation of humanity*. Education and training are involved in the practical reduction of the 'human' to a form of capital: human capital. Conversely, an inquiry into the social form of the human can expose the form that labour-power assumes in capitalist society (human capital). This deeper horror can be uncovered with reference to five theses first presented in my paper to the Birkbeck College Seminar on 'Marx, Individuals and Society' in October 2000, entitled *Marx and the Future of the Human* (Rikowski, 2000e). These theses are presented unedited.

What is the *social form* of the 'human' in capitalism? What is the social form of *labour-power* in capitalist society? The following 'alien theses' have these questions in view throughout.

(1)

If the social universe of capital is a *field of social energy (or force)*, and value is the *substance* of this social universe, then there is no externality, no 'outside' or beyond this social universe. Neither does an 'inside' pertain; the social universe of capital *is all that there is*, as the sum of 'the social'. On this basis, every social phenomenon is already situated as an element within this social universe and assumes a particular *social form* on this basis. *This applies to the 'human' too*. There can be no exceptions, as this implies either externality beyond the social field of force (i.e. existence within *another* social universe), or a vacuum within the field (the mythical "spaces between the margins" of post-modern folk law). The 'human' as a form of capital can be conveniently called human-capital; the critique of human-capital, therefore, becomes a critique of the form of the 'human' as given by capitalist society.

(2)

The development of capitalism coincides with the capitalisation of humanity (Rikowski, 1999, p.50). Humans increasingly become something Other than human; a new life-form, a 'new species' (Marx, 1844). This is because capital is a progressive movement *towards totality*. Its development on this basis 'consists precisely in subordinating all elements of society to itself' for 'this is historically how it becomes a totality' (Marx, 1858). This includes the 'human' – there are no special exceptions. With the deepening of capitalist social relations and the strengthening of capital as social force within its own social energy field, we evolve as a capitalist life-form: *human-capital*. In the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, Marx (1844), Marx talks about the 'becoming' of capital. There are four dimensions to this. First, spatial extension: as the *expanding social universe of capital*. Secondly, the *deepening* of capital as social force within its domain: the processes of the phenomena within the social universe of capital 'becoming' capital to an increasing extent (with the advantage that capital's existence within us *becomes increasingly obvious*). Thirdly, the previous point heralds the conclusion that the movement towards totality is an historical process; it has forward infinity in its own movement. There is no end point, no rest. This conditions all the social drives at work within the social universe of capital: they are infinite (though obviously, they cannot be *expressed* infinitely). Finally, there is the becoming of capital in the sense that it 'comes alive' as new social energy deriving from new (surplus) value. It is continually reborn within the labour process where its social energy is generated, and on which its whole universe depends.

(3)

Labour-power's transformation into labour within the labour process generates (surplus) value. Labour-power flows throughout personhood; it is a unitary force (though much reified in personnel and recruitment studies and research). Labour-power's *social form* in capitalist society is as human-capital. Labour-power is the flip side of human-capital. Human-capital has a *double form*: the social form labour-power assumes in capitalist society, *and* as the form of the human. The reduction of humanity to labour-power simultaneously *expresses* the practical reduction of the 'human' to capital. Labour-power flows throughout personhood; hence the person *is* capital (Rikowski, 1999; Neary and Taylor, 1998). I am capital.

(4)

The fourth thesis – the weakest – rests on the notion of equal exchange. In the first two volumes of *Capital*, Marx proceeds on the basis of equal exchange. Labour-power, as presented by Marx, is a (positive) social force. However, in its expenditure, on the basis of equal exchange, it too must be exchanged against another (negative) social force. *Capital* can be posited as such a social force. However, this reintroduces Newtonian conceptions of 'strange forces', rather than force being a field within which relations create its continuance *as* force. Furthermore, the negative force of capital sounds like the kind of possession akin to *demon* possession, but this may not be a disadvantage.

(5)

Marx provides a further thesis for the capitalisation of the 'human'. In the capitalist labour process, labour-power becomes an aspect of capital: it is *capitalised*. As Marx notes, in the labour process...

... the worker functions here as a special natural form of this capital, as distinct from the elements of

capital that exist in the natural form of means of production. (1878, pp.455-456)

Furthermore, labourers develop themselves as labour-power within the labour process, but as labour power of a specific kind: human-capital, as the form labour-power assumes in capitalism. There is a two-fold process going on when labourers labour within the capitalist labour process:

... the individual not only develops his abilities in production but also expends them, uses them up in the act of production. (1857, p.90) ... [And hence] ... Universal prostitution appears as a necessary phase in the development of the social character of personal talents, capacities, abilities, activities ... (1858, p.163).

As labour-power is inseparable from the person (and flows throughout personhood), therefore we have *personhood capitalised*, *humans capitalised*, *human-capital* (Rikowski, 1999, pp.70-71).

Taking all of these five theses together, then:

Capital becomes a living social force within the human ... *and this is the basis of the transhuman; it is this that makes us 'extra-human'*. Capital is not just 'out there'; we are it, it is *we* (Rikowski, 1999, p.71 – original emphases).

We are *already* transhuman (post-human even) *as a life form within the social universe of capital*. Trans/post-humanism is typically associated with the take-over of humans by new technologies, heralding the emergence of the cyborg (fused human-machine entity). But the trans/post-humanist theorists are too late: we are already 'not-human'. The capitalisation of 'the human' has been going on for centuries, and its intensity is increasing. The form that labour-power takes in capitalist society – human capital – is as an extra-human social existence that education and training (as human capital producers) are actively engaged in promoting and developing. Looked at in this way, capitalist education and training will never be the same! They nurture the 'horror within' us; labour-power as capital, capital as a social force flowing throughout our personhoods.

The social production of labour-power, on this analysis, is implicated in the social production of a particular form of 'the human': human capital. It involves the reduction of humanity to capital, the capitalisation of humanity. Education and training are the central institutions of an organised, intentional process of labour-power production in contemporary society. Hence, they are not innocent as key players in the production of human capital, the human as capital. Fortunately, there are limits to this process (discussed in Rikowski, 1999, pp.79-80) based on the contradictory nature of labour-power itself (expounded in Rikowski, 2002a) – contradictions not explored in this paper. They are our hope, along with Marxist science (that seeks to expose these contradictions) and a politics of human resistance to our capitalisation, a politics where struggles against the form that education and training take in capitalist society are at the forefront of political life.

3. Education as a Moment within the Social Production of Labour-power in Capitalism

[Labour power]... is sold as a capacity, a power, and a specific amount of labour-time was required to *produce* this capacity, this power. (Karl Marx, 1866, *Results of the Immediate Process of Production*, p.1066 – original emphasis)

... what he [the labourer] pays out for education is devilishly little, but when he does, his payments are productive, for *education produces labour-power*. (Karl Marx, 1863a, *Theories of Surplus Value – Part One*, p.210 – my emphasis)

Productive labour ...[also includes]... such labour as produces commodities or directly produces, trains, develops, maintains or reproduces labour power itself. (Karl Marx, 1863a, *Theories of Surplus Value – Part One*, p.172)

The social production of labour-power is simultaneously the social production of a specific form of labour-power in capitalist society (human-capital) and the production of a particular form of humanity (the human as capital, or human capital once more). ‘Human capital’ is both a form of the human and a form of labour-power in capitalist society. So what is the social production of labour-power in capitalist society? Did Marx recognise it?

First it should be noted that Marx did not articulate any analysis of the social production of labour-power. He was primarily interested in labour-power insofar as it entered into the determination of the value of the ‘general class’ of commodities. Thus, in *Capital*, Marx spent a lot of space on the value of labour-power, as this was a consideration in his exploration of value and the determination of surplus value. Second, Marx states that in the first two volumes of his masterwork, *Capital*, he assumed that ‘labour-power can always be found to hand’ (1878, p.121). There was no need to analyse its social production, therefore. However, even in the third volume of *Capital* Marx did not explore the social production of labour-power, though it has to be acknowledged that it was his co-worker, Friedrich Engels, who actually compiled volume III of *Capital* after Marx’s death. But it is really unsurprising that Marx did not elaborate on the social production of labour-power in capitalism as one of its most significant elements – compulsory schooling – hardly existed when Marx was writing up various drafts of *Capital* from the mid-1850s to the late-1870s. The 1870 Education Act in England appeared to have made little impression on Marx. Today, however, it is possible to readily see the significance of £50 billion worth of state education funding in the UK as a key element of the pertinent productive process – the social production of labour-power.

Marx certainly recognised that the labour involved in labour-power production, reproduction, development and maintenance was *productive*, even though it did not directly produce surplus value (the usual yardstick for productive labour) – as the third extract at the beginning of this section testifies (Marx, 1863a, p.172). Marx also states many times that labour-power was *produced*, underwent a process of production. For example:

...needs are produced just as are products and the different kinds of work skills. (1858, p.527)

The capitalist does not exchange capital directly for labour or labour time; but rather time contained, worked up in commodities, for time contained, worked up in living labour capacity. (1858, p.673)

Furthermore, Marx provides examples where he notes that education and training are implicated in the production of labour-power. One instance is when he talks about the labourer paying for education, noting caustically that ‘what he pays out for education is devilishly little, but when he does, his payments are productive, for *education produces labour-power*.’ (Marx, 1863a, p.210).

On discussing the position of schoolmasters vis-à-vis un/productive labour, Marx notes that their labour 'enters into the production costs of labour-power' (1863a, p.168), and...

As to the purchase of such services as those which train labour-power, maintain or modify it, etc., in a word, give it a specialised form or even only maintain it - thus for example the schoolmaster's service, in so far as it is "industrially necessary" or useful; the doctor's service, in so far as he maintains health and so conserves the source of all values, labour-power itself - these are services which yield in return "a vendible commodity, etc.", namely labour-power itself, into whose costs of production or reproduction these services enter. (1863a, p.167)

However, in this last example, Marx makes a distinction between the social production of labour-power (through education), and its maintenance (through health services). He sometimes conflates or confuses the following social processes pertaining to labour-power:

- Its **social reproduction** (first phase) through the wage form – the purchase and consumption of goods arising out of the worker's socially necessary labour that constitutes the 'bundle of necessities' for subsistence
- Its **social reproduction** (second phase) – the value required to raise the 'workers of the future', to maintain children and produce children as future labour-powers
- Its **maintenance** – the value to support services (such as health) that *maintain* labour-power as labour-power, and
- Its **social production** – the processes that take on organisational and institutional forms for *producing* labour-power, such as education and training.

These are not necessarily exhaustive of the forms of labour-power re/production, but they are the main ones that Marx deals with in *Capital* and elsewhere. The following example is where he conflates two of these social processes:

Given the individual, the production of labour-power consists in his reproduction of himself or his maintenance. (Marx, 1865a, p.67)

Marx here mentions the production of labour-power but he is not referring to its production by education and training; he really means its social reproduction (and at other times he uses the notion of reproduction in relation to the worker/necessary labour/wage relations). He also confuses labour-power production with its maintenance. The following extract is interesting as Marx starts from social reproduction of labour-power (first phase) as I have characterised it above, but notes that social reproduction of labour-power is limited by its social production:

The value of the labouring power is determined by the quantity of labour necessary to maintain or reproduce it, but the use of that labouring power is only limited by the active energies and physical strength of the labourer. (1865b, pp.57-58)

In another example, Marx explicitly refers to the *maintenance* of labour-power, for labour-time is 'necessary to preserve the labouring capacity, as *necessary labour* in general' (1858, p.359).

What these examples indicate is that we must take great care when we rush to say that 'Marx is talking about the social production of labour-power', or about its social reproduction. The notion of the social production of labour-power was a process that Marx hardly recognised. Its social existence was very hazy in his time, with state schooling just emerging. Indeed, its lack of social definition in Marx's day led him to conclude that:

Labour as a social and natural force does not develop within the valorization process as such, but within the *actual labour process*. It presents itself therefore as a set of attributes that are intrinsic to

capital as a thing, as its use-value. (1866, p.1056)

Thus: the labour process itself is a force that develops labour-power. Marx (1863c, p.148; 1865a, p.292) distinguishes between the costs of production of specific labour powers and their reproduction on occasion. But the social production of labour-power remains shadowy. I have argued elsewhere (Rikowski, 1999) that there are basically two aspects to the social production of labour-power:

First, there is the development of labour power *potential*, the capacity to labour effectively within the labour process. Secondly, there is the development of the willingness of workers to utilise their labouring power, to expend themselves within the labour process as value-creating force. This is manifested in all the studies that pinpoint work attitudes as the most sought after and significant attribute of workers in recruitment studies, and the exhortations of employers that schools must produce 'well motivated' young people, with sound attitudes to work and recruits who are 'work-ready' and embody 'employability' – though these points would need to be driven home through focused empirical and historical studies. (Rikowski, 1999, p.77)

The social production of labour-power refers to a process that is highly fragmented in capitalist society. Today, it typically includes compulsory education. However, it can include training (on- and off-the-job), various forms of personal development programmes, further and higher education, computer-based training and many other elements. It also develops through labour itself, "spontaneously", within the labour process (Marx, 1863a, p.167). This last is labour-power's "automatic" production, though various 'learning company' strategies are attempts to formalise this.

Empirically, therefore, concrete forms of labour-power production can be very complex. A study of the engineering industry I undertook in Coventry in the early-1980s threw up a range of concrete forms of labour-power production. There are also general, abstract and elementary forms of labour-power production that invariably do not exist in contemporary capitalism (and some either never existed or could not – logically – exist). The point of exploring these forms, especially in relation to education and training history, is that they can illuminate regarding *why* the social production of labour-power is so fragmented (in general). They also inform regarding the particular form of fragmentation in the cases under examination – but this work remains for the future.⁷

As I have argued on many occasions (Rikowski, 1990, 1995, 1999, 2000a, 2000c, 2000d, and 2002a), the best starting point for Marxist educational theory is labour-power and its social production. In *That Other Great Class of Commodities* (Rikowski, 2000d) I examined other possible starting points (e.g. education and the global market, the labour process and other springboards). But I concluded that the problems they raised, and, more importantly, the issues such starting points *avoided* (especially the question of what makes capitalist education and training specifically *capitalist* in nature) made labour-power and its social production by far the most promising first base for Marxist educational theory. So, given the arguments of this paper, what is the importance of radical educators in capitalism today?

4. The Importance of Being a Radical Educator in Capitalism Today

This paper's call for a repositioning of Marxist educational theory onto the ground of labour-power means that the social production of labour-power becomes a key focus: for theory, for research and for education politics. This 'educational politics of labour-power production' appears to be complex (as the social production of labour-power is fragmented). Essentially though, it is simple. It is a politics of *human resistance* to processes of de-humanisation generated by the social production of labour power. This is resistance to becoming *capital*, human-capital; the social form labour-power assumes in capitalist society. A politics of human resistance also has a deeper significance. It is a politics aimed at an *open future*. This is a future where capital's social relations and forms do not foreclose the meaning and substance of the 'human' and nature of the social. It is, therefore, a politics that seeks the abolition of the value-form of labour and hence capital itself.

Being a radical educator in capitalism today attains significance on a number of grounds. These considerations indicate that rather than being on the margins of social transformation, radical education and training and radical educators and trainers are at the heart of the process. There are four main arguments involved.

1. The Strategic Significance of Education

The substance of capital's social universe is value. Labour-power produces value, and education and training in capitalist society are heavily implicated in the social production of labour-power: the commodity that generates the social universe of capital. Furthermore, labour-power is capital's weakest link, as it resides within us, within our personhoods, and is hence subject to our wills. Hence, education and training in capitalist society have massive *strategic significance* for the maintenance and expansion of capital. It is on this point that the social power of teachers, trainers and education researchers – educators in the broadest sense – rests.

Of course, governments instinctively sense this, even though they do not articulate it in this manner. On the back of these instincts, they attempt to control and regulate the labour of teachers and education researchers on the basis of three main social drives. First, to ensure that education and training are constituted as forms of human capital production, for international competitiveness within a globalising economy - to sustain and augment the national capital. Second, to contain education and training as sustainers of the value-form of labour, which simultaneously hampers alternative forms of labour-power development. Third, to narrow the social space for the development of critical perspectives on the constitution of capitalist society and the development of alternatives: to erase 'critical space'.

On these grounds, teachers are 'dangerous workers': they develop and nurture the social force (labour-power) that powers and maintains capitalist society. They are like 'angels of the fuel dump' (labour-power being 'fuel for the living fire' of labour), or 'guardians of the flame'. If you want to be at the cutting edge of the class struggle there are no better places to be than in education and training in contemporary capitalism! Thus, the control of teachers' labour on these grounds appears as an iron necessity. These points could be empirically related to regulation, assessment, targeting, standards and inspection regimes within all sectors of education. On this basis, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) would never look the same again!

Radical educators, inspired and armed with Marxist educational theory can blow the lid off this can of worms – both practically (as practitioners), as political actors and theoreticians of labour-

power (labour-power theory). Their significance arises from their understanding that education and training in contemporary society are subject to processes that *reduce them to labour-power production*.

2. Education against the Capitalisation of Humanity

Education and training in capitalist society are involved in the capitalisation of humanity. Labour-power is an aspect of, but inseparable from, our 'selves'. Contemporary education and training, and this most clearly in Blair's Britain (see Cole, 2000; Hatcher and Hirtt, 1999; Hill, 1999; Hill and Cole, 2001; and Levidow, 2001), have been narrowed as processors of human capital, the human as a form of capital. Examples from other countries can be readily found (e.g. McLaren, 2000 – for the United States; and Banfield, 2000 – for Australia). Labour-power takes the form of human capital (on an incremental scale) in capitalist society. Thus, as we are moulded and shaped into human capital, that is, our labour-powers are created in this way, then our 'selves' *become capital*. This is because our labour-powers (as human capital) cannot be separated out from the rest of our personhoods. We cannot somehow insulate ourselves from being infected by this social force, capital.

Radical educators, therefore (and typically they are unaware of this), are implicitly involved in the struggle against the capitalisation of humanity, against the reduction of the 'human' to capital through education and training. Typically, this occurs by default. This is because, as radical educators promote principles (e.g. equality, social justice etc.) that have no validity or social existence in capitalist society, the struggles to make these principles 'real' and 'valid' inevitably run up against the limits of capitalist society and call its legitimacy and 'humanity' into question.

My work seeks to make all this **explicit** for radical educators – and for everyone else; to expose the way in which our options for the future are limited by capital as a form of life. If we want equality and social justice in education and elsewhere then my work seeks to show that we can only have these, or at least we have a *chance* of having them, if we dissolve capital as the socially dominating force in society.

3. A Politics of Human Resistance

The previous two points herald the need for a *politics of human resistance*: a politics that resists our reduction to human capital, especially through education and training. Such a politics catapults teachers and trainers to the forefront of resistance to capital. Radical Left educators clearly have a key role in the development of such a politics. They are structurally situated at the forefront of capitalisation of the 'human'.

4. Education for a Socialist Future – vision, alternative principles and practices

Fourthly, radical educators have a major role, not just in organising resistance to the reduction for education and training to human capital formation, but also in offering alternative visions, principles, policies and practices that enable a socialist future. This is one of the goals of the Hillcole Group of Radical Left Educators, which was set up in the UK in 1989. Founded by Dave Hill and Mike Cole in opposition to the Radical Right Hillgate Group, the Hillcole Group has developed alternative, socialist education principles and visions (e.g. Hillcole Group, 1997) and

policies (e.g. Hillcole Group, 1991). Second, the Group has produced a series of education policy critiques – an essential task for radical Left educators as they seek to frame anti-capitalist, egalitarian and socially just educational and societal alternatives (e.g. Hill, 2000a, 2000b; Rikowski, 2001b).

As it becomes clear that education and training in capitalism today are basically forcing houses for human capital, and as this implies that ‘we are becoming capital’, then radical educators’ contributions for reconfiguring society towards a socialist future will become increasingly significant. The importance of being a radical educator today is that they are in a privileged position to observe, uncover and report and theorise on trends and developments exposed in this paper – and to argue for education and training to be tied to a future *with* a future: socialism.

Conclusion: Education and Anti-capitalism

Two trillion dollars or one-twentieth of global gross domestic product: this is what the world spends on education according to the most measured assessments. The private sector, which accounts for roughly a fifth of the amount, is determined to capture a larger share of this giant market. Riding on a neo-liberal wave, vaunting greater efficiency, innovation and knowledge of the job market, the corporate world is gaining unprecedented influence in running education and shaping its goals. (Cynthia Guttman, *Education: the last frontier for profit*, 2000a)

The theft of the White House by George W. Bush is a defining moment in the globalisation of the world economy. A corporate coup followed the Bush campaign's electoral fraud, placing the White House effectively under the control of giant business interests. (Robert Silver, *Taking power from the global corporations*, 2001, p.4)

As the winds of liberalization blow onwards, a new vocabulary is running through education plucked straight from the corporate universe. Principals step into the shoes of managers, parents become choosy customers while schools compete and innovate, striving to offer an efficient, quality service, which at the end of the day yields a profit and turns out graduates for the job market. (Cynthia Guttman, *Education Inc.*? 2000b, p.1)

This paper has provided arguments for the importance of being a radical educator in today's capitalist society. Summarising these arguments, the key points are, first, that education and training in contemporary capitalism are intimately involved in socially producing the single commodity on which rests the whole social universe of capital: labour-power. This gives education and training, and teachers and educators, a particular form of social power. This point also illustrates the strategic significance of education and training and teachers and trainers in the social transformation of capitalism into socialism. They are crucial to the struggles for a socialist future. Second, education and training, and teachers and trainers are involved in the reduction of humanity to capital as they socially produce the 'human' as capital, human-capital. Thus, forms of education and training that resist capitalisation of 'the human' are required. The radical educator therefore, seeking to link education and training to anti-capitalist outlooks and action, has an essential role to play in channelling capital's weakest link, labour-power, into non- and anti-capitalist social forms. Furthermore, radical educators are resisters regarding our reduction of 'the human' to human-capital, the social form labour-power assumes in capitalist society. Radical educators, anti-capitalist by definition, work against our reduction to human-capital and for the possibility of an open future for humanity.

Inevitably, these arguments regarding the significance of radical educators are not the only ones. One of the key omissions is that radical educators will have a crucial role to play in the forthcoming struggles over the privatisation and business takeover of education. These developments are sanctioned by the World Trade Organisation's (WTO) education agenda (neoliberalism and privatisation). This agenda ultimately sets the education policy framework for national governments, local education authorities and individual education institutions. All three major British political parties are committed to realising the WTO education agenda. I have addressed these issues elsewhere in *The Battle in Seattle: Its significance for education* (Rikowski 2001b). Others have also taken this up (Cole, 1998; Hatcher, 2001; Hatcher and Hirtt, 1999; Hirtt, 2000; Monbiot, 2000; Regan, 2001, and Rutherford, 2000a, 2000b).

It is crucial that the WTO education agenda is related to education policies in nation states and supranational entities such as the European Union (EU) and the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) and, for those in Britain, specifically to New Labour's education policy. The work of Nico Hirtt (2000) and Jonathan Rutherford (2001a) is exemplary here. Furthermore, we need to relate

both to the ways in which New Labour has transformed words such as 'radical' and 'modernisation' into code for the take-over of public services by business interests. There is a need to uncover the real social processes involved. As Mike Cole points out:

Modernisation is ... a real social process, which is 'determined' by the current features of capitalism: its necessity to grow and spread. It is also used ideologically by politicians to justify major changes in the structures of capitalist states. Thus, when politicians talk about the need to modernise, they are not simply reflecting the need for progress in the abstract, but are articulating the needs of capital at specific historical junctures. (Cole, 1999, p.5)

In the 2001 General Election campaign, New Labour Ministers (and especially Prime Minister Tony Blair) attempted to construct a façade of cool-sounding, futuristic lingo over their real job of work: the hand-over of public services to capital. Finally, there is a need to link the WTO education agenda – via the education and training policies of states and inter-state trading blocs – to what is actually going on in local education authorities, colleges and schools. On this point, the work of Richard Hatcher (2001) shows the way. Hatcher relates the general social drive to commercialise and capitalise education underwritten by the WTO to the specific education policies of New Labour that facilitate the WTO-inspired business takeover of schools. He links the global and the local, and indicates how a struggle to save a single school from business take-over constitutes a threat to the whole project.

The business takeover of public services is speeding up after the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) proposals that started in February 2002 were boosted by the Ministerial Meeting of the WTO in Doha, Qatar in November 2001. This is a subject all three major parties are reluctant to address. The global education policy for capital is not a comfortable topic for mainstream politicians.

In *The Battle in Seattle* (Rikowski, 2001b), it was argued that education is crucial for the anti-capitalist struggles ahead. Certainly, the four arguments for the importance of being a radical educator today expressed in the previous section can be readily related to the WTO's education agenda. Using Richard Hatcher's distinction (2001), radical educators resist the business agenda *in* education (the neoliberal drive to open up education to capital) and also the business agenda *for* education (the reduction of education to labour-power production). The importance of a Marxist analysis of capitalist education and training for radical educators cannot be overemphasised. Others have made the same point (Allman, 1999, 2001; and McLaren, 2000). Without such analysis, our claim to be 'radical' is diminished, for this claim must rest ultimately on the abolition of capital and its social universe. Karl Marx is still the greatest theorist of capitalist society, and an anti-capitalist politics of human resistance can have no better foundation than in his work.

Notes

1. As I have addressed the weaknesses of the 'old' Marxist educational theory elsewhere (e.g. Rikowski, 1995, 1996, 1997 and 2000d), I shall not go into these here.
2. After doing a Postgraduate Certificate in Education in 1978-79, I taught in a comprehensive school in Felixstowe in 1978-79. From 1982-85, I was a Research & Development Officer for Coventry LEA. In the 1985-1989 period I worked in further education colleges and schools in London and Essex, and from 1989-1994 I worked at Epping Forest College whilst gaining some higher education experience on Visiting Lecturer contracts (at the universities of London, North London and Hertfordshire).

3. This section draws from a paper presented at the British Educational Research Association Conference 2000, *Messing with the Explosive Commodity: school improvement, educational research and labour-power in the era of global capitalism* (Rikowski, 2000c), and also from *Marx and the Future of the Human* (Rikowski, 2000e). However, it is principally based on material from a draft of *Fuel for and Living Fire: Labour-Power!* (Rikowski, 2002a) that was written in March 2001.
4. My paper *That Other Great Class of Commodities: Repositioning Marxist Educational Theory* (Rikowski, 2000d) focuses on arguing for labour-power as the foundation for Marxist educational theory.
5. A liberal Left outlook can be defined as holding that notions such as social justice, equality and autonomy can have real social existence within capitalist society. Capital, however, is a 'blind social force, without ego' (Postone, 1996). Therefore, no 'values' have any social validity. It is a social universe based on *value* rather than 'values'. Exchange-value is the only form of 'equality' socially validated in capital's social universe. Social justice, equality, autonomy and agency can only have a virtual existence in capitalist society; they can only be the *struggle for themselves*. Thus, 'social justice' becomes the 'struggle for social justice' – that is its substance within contemporary society (Rikowski, 2000b). However, when looked at like this, social justice, agency, and equality etc. become subversive of capital. They attempt to establish a form of sociality that cannot exist in capitalism. Furthermore, the gross inequalities, themselves generated by capital and its markets, fuel the anger that drives on efforts to establish social equality. These efforts clash against the barriers to social life erected by capital, such as its prohibition on equality, and they point towards the need to establish a form of society *where equality is possible*, where it can have *real social existence*.
6. For example, Marx indicates in *Theories of Surplus Value – Part One* (1863a) that the 'two great classes of commodities' correspond to two classes of labourers – a point that would be interesting to elaborate on elsewhere. Those producing 'general commodities' can be distinguished from those socially producing labour-power on the basis of *value*. The former labourers produce value itself (directly), whereas the latter produce the value-creating force (labour-power). Thus, notes Marx, '...the former class will produce immediate, material wealth consisting of *commodities*, all commodities except those which consist of labour-power itself' (1863a p.161, - original emphasis) – though here Marx fails to note that labour-power is a commodity too.
7. Preliminary work on these abstract, elementary and general forms of labour-power production was undertaken by myself in the late-1980s and then abandoned – for no very good reason, other than to earn money for survival needs. I hope to explore these again some day.

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24th May 2001, and revised and extended 30th May 2001, Birmingham
Revised and extended, 20th March 2002, London

The B Generation

Some people talk about Generation X and others bemoan Generation Why? In recent articles in *New Statesman*, DEMOS think-tanker Tom Bentley claims to be able to divine what the cool dudes of generationNEXT really, really think about the issues of our time. I am a member of the B Generation: the **Bastard Generation**, the ‘baby boomers’ born in the generation following the Second World War. In the sphere of British education and training policy the B Generation calls the shots. **Blair**, **Blunkett**, **Baroness Blackstone**, **Byers** and **Brown** – all major players in education and training policy, and ‘Bs’ – all of them: the **B Generation**. Of course, there’s Schools Minister Estelle Morris that doesn’t fit the stereotype, but she does come from **Birmingham** (don’t push it!).

It is quite despicable what B Generation politicians have done to those students now in compulsory education and in further and higher education (HE). For now, let’s focus on HE. The B Generation Ministers listed above benefited, like I did, from a fee-free HE. There was no formal loan system; we got grants instead (with the ‘parental contribution’ to the grant dependent on income). In most areas of the country up to the mid-1970s we could get jobs in vacations to supplement our grants. But if we couldn’t get, or didn’t want, vacation employment we could claim social security payments and housing benefits. We even figured in the unemployment statistics! It sounds like another world.

The Conservative administrations of 1979-97 started the process of toughening up students for a money-centred version of educational reality. The value of the grant was set on a downward course, welfare benefits were systematically withdrawn, students were encouraged to take out loans in a softening-up process for the New Labour bombshell in 1997: **abolition of student grants and the institution of fees**. New Labour’s B Generation had learnt well from its Tory mentors, and from the spirits of gurus such as Sir Keith Joseph. To establish credible policy continuity, programmes of key skills, more work experience and closer and deeper ties between industry and HE were advanced as economic necessities.

Lord Dearing’s penchant for undergraduate work experience was one of the most bizarre policy obsessions of the late-1990s. After all, many students *had* to work to keep their student role intact. The **student-worker**, full-time students with ‘part-time’ jobs in term-time, is now the norm. Media stories of students turning to prostitution and drug-dealing became common in the closing years of the last century. Speculation about the effects of term-time working on course grades, exam scores and degree class surfaced in the education press, but research into these issues was not a major priority. Studies by the National Union of Students partially filled a gap that the Economic & Social Research Council should have filled more substantially *prior* to New Labour’s student funding regime starting up. For students, the real challenge is to minimise debt. This carries its own forms of stress and fear additional to the traditional nerves involved in pitching for a Geoff Hurst (a first class degree) or facing the prospects of a ‘turd’ (a third). A Scottish Low Pay Unit study of 1997 showed that increased student poverty was accompanied by escalating depression that sometimes resulted in the abandonment of studies – and this before New Labour’s HE student finance policies kicked in. In 1998, a National Union of Students’ *Student Hardship Survey* indicated that average student debt would be £9,000 at the point of graduation. Money, debt and ‘higher learning’ are increasingly generating symbiotic relations that have altered the parameters of the contemporary HE experience. Today’s students are different, mainly because HE and associated welfare policies

delivered by B Generation Ministers have fundamentally altered the learning and financial landscapes within which HE students have been forced to exist.

In all this New Labour speaks with forked tongue. New Labour Ministers claim to be champions of 'widening participation' and combating social exclusion by encouraging working class people, inner city folks, mature students and under-represented ethnic minority groups into HE. But the HE participation rates of some of these groups have been affected significantly by New Labour's student finance regime. Unsurprisingly, as dropout rates rose in the late-1990s the 'student retention problem' became the focus of high-level conferences for the upper echelons of HE management.

New Labour's B Generation Ministers are also enthusiastic about opening up HE (and all sectors of education) more widely and more deeply to corporate capital. Two World Trade Organisation (WTO) reports of 1998 berated WTO members for their slothfulness in paving the way for the 'businessification' of education. Negotiators at a WTO meeting in Geneva a few weeks ago reached an agreement for opening up services (including education) to global capital. Struggles against the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), the WTO's formal mechanism for nurturing the systematic transference of educational institutions into the hands of capitalist enterprise, are only just beginning. For '**education, education, education**', read '**business, business, business**' – New Labour's education policy as driven by GATS imperatives. The vision is that not only will student lives be conditioned by my money, but that they will study within a capitalised environment where the virus of the private sector e-versity, the online learning machine, stalks the learning terrain, thus making the poverty of student life an aspect of capitalist development.

Although I am technically part of the B Generation I repudiate its ruling passions, along with growing numbers of the B Generation involved in anti-capitalist organisations, radical environmentalist groups and the Socialist Alliances. There is a certain unfairness and inaccuracy in the B Generation label, I admit. Nevertheless, all members of the B Generation must take a modicum of responsibility for what has happened. For "Yes, we have let this happen – us, who had the magic of the '60s, and a youth before the end of the post-war boom". **The trend of making life tough for students must be reversed.**

Today, politicians and business leaders in leading capitalist nations and economic blocs call for education to develop higher levels of employability skills and worker subservience to the tyranny of work. The process appears to have no terminus. Furthermore, it seems that British capitalism cannot provide a decent HE experience for all those that want it, a perspective that ultimately challenges the utility and desirability of capitalist society. There is always the option of retreating to an elitist position where we finance HE for 10-15% of the population, thus concentrating resources. Preferably, we could increase income tax rates to pay for a better HE student life (and for other public services). But the poverty of student life cannot be eradicated so easily when forces and pressures are building up – through the WTO's GATS globally, supported by neoliberal New Labour Ministers nationally – to **capitalise the whole of social existence**. Thus, the struggle against the poverty of student life is an aspect of the struggle for a society not dominated by the law of money and the social force of capital. I am in the B Generation but out of synch with its national leaders' visions and motivations, and the forms of economic and social development they are sponsoring. The struggle for a mass, desirable and worthwhile HE experience is at root a simultaneous struggle for a form of society where human need and the planet's sustainability are at the core of social and economic development. The B Generation must not just change its political

leaders (perhaps even dissolving “leadership” altogether) but the direction of its march, thereby changing its identity. This implies an anti-capitalist programme of resistance and transformation by and for *all* generations, for all peoples, on a global scale. The May Day Monopoly events can become one of many sparks igniting a fantastic fire that over time burns through the currently constituted limits of capitalist social life, providing pathways into a **future *with* a future: socialism.**

Glenn Rikowski – London, 1st May 2001

Written for the May Day Monopoly events in London

Postscript

Copies of *The B Generation* were distributed in London during the May Day Monopoly events. Most of them were given out during a march against higher education tuition fees that started out from the University of London Union (ULU) and which was broken up as the protestors attempted to make their way towards the World Bank building. People arrived at the World Bank in small groups, but when they finally got there – after being harassed by the police along the way – they witnessed a mass demonstration of more than 1,000 protestors outside the building.

After yelling at the World Bank for a while, the protestors moved off towards Oxford Street for the ‘Sale of the Century’. But I never got to see what this really entailed, as, when the throng arrived in Oxford Circus, it came to a halt. The police were corralling us into the Circus. Fortunately, I was towards the outside of the crowd in the Circus when the police started to cordon off the area. I had to be home to meet the kids from school, so I left Oxford Circus at around 2.50pm. I had great difficulty in getting out, but managed to slip through down an alleyway. Another five minutes or so and I would have been there for 6 hours with the rest of the anti-capitalist crowd, which included families with kids. My kids, meanwhile, would have been roaming the streets, not knowing what was going on and when I would show up.

Arriving home safely, but with some regret that I had left early, I logged into my e-mail only to discover that I was being hit by a truck load of computer viruses. One got through the defences and put my computer out of action for a few weeks. A coincidence? Perhaps, but I hadn’t received any viruses for months previous. Maybe the police had got hold of one of my leaflets.

When I turned on the evening news I was appalled to discover that many of the people I had been marching with from the World Bank to Oxford Circus had been incarcerated in the Circus for such a long time. Some of those held there against their will had medical conditions that the police had ignored, there were no toilet facilities and it had been raining throughout the day. Some tourists got caught up in the crowd and were subjected to the ‘effective’ policing that was praised to the skies in the newspapers the following day. Even some journalists within the mainstream press could not hide the basic denial of human rights implied in the policing of the protestors in Oxford Circus, nor ignore the dubious legality of holding a thousand people for six hours in such conditions. As Dinerstein and Neary (2002) relate:

Those who were there [in Oxford Circus] describe the experience as ‘demoralising and debilitating’. The crowd was eventually allowed to leave, but only after being individually photographed. The use of photographic recording is technically only permitted when the police have strong grounds for suspecting a person of having been involved in criminal activity. ... By the end of the day in London, 28 protestors were injured, 3 police officers were hurt, including one woman police constable who collapsed after being crushed. Altogether there were 91 arrests and 150 people are planning collective legal action for unlawful imprisonment supported by the civil liberties pressure group ‘Liberty’. The cost to business is estimated at £20 million pounds. (p.228)

I was lucky. I have a permanent back injury from a car crash in 1994 that makes standing still for long periods painful. The thought of a six-hour stint in the rain in Oxford Circus was not appealing.

However, the fire of protest will not be extinguished by such policing “methods”. For the light that shines on a future beyond capitalist social existence will always burn. As Paula Allman has written:

This is a light that always burns in some hearts, somewhere; the task is to enable it to burn more brightly and widely until it obliterates the horizon of capitalism. (2001, p.13)

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6th March 2002, London