

## NEW RESOURCES FOR REVOLUTIONARY CRITICAL EDUCATION

Shahrzad Mojab

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The neo-conservative/liberal policy of "All Power to the Market" implemented throughout the world in the last two decades has failed. The streets of our cities are speaking loud and clear. From Seattle, to Washington, Prague, Quebec City, Ankara, and Gothenburg, people are shouting "No!" to privatization, globalization, capitalism, ecocide and warmongering. There are about a hundred million abused and hungry "street kids" in the world's megacities. Slavery is reemerging in some of the poverty-stricken countries of the "developing world." Every year, about two million girls from the age of five to fifteen are drawn into the global prostitution market. About hundred million human beings do not have adequate shelter. Tens of thousands of people die everyday because of hunger and malnutrition every day. About 830 million people are not "food secure," that is, are hungry. Military spending in 2000 was \$798 billion, of which \$295 billion, or 37 percent, was spent by the US. During this year, the US provided half of all arms sold around the world, and the European Union was the second largest arms dealer with about 24 per cent of sales (Metro [Toronto], June 14, 2001: 8). The new government in the most powerful state, the United States, is launching a new round of arms race and environmental disasters. In the industrial West, the "information" or "knowledge" economy has failed to deliver the promised miracles of abundance and democracy. Downsizing, unemployment, homelessness, and job insecurity are the order of the day in the richest countries of the North. The state and the market have combined forces to turn citizens into consumers whose value lies only in their full "confidence" in the capitalist economy. Report after report tell us about the widening gap between rich and poor, both in the North and the South. While globalization has created a haven for capital, it has also globalized the pollution of air, water, food, poverty, and foot and mouth disease.

It is in this context that the authors of the books discussed here have taken stock of our work in education. Where does educational theory and practice stand in this struggle? What is the role of education in this polarizing world?

What is the context of these debates? The assumption of power by neoconservatives in Britain, Canada and the United States in the early 1980s coincided with rise of an equally conservative brand of theory and politics in the academy. This turn in the academy has been variously termed "linguistic," "discursive," "postmodernist," "poststructuralist," "cultural(ist)," and so on. For instance, in educational studies, as in other disciplines, the conceptualization of oppressor/oppressed relations was changed to centre/margin oppositionality in which the margin can rather easily move to the centre and vice versa. "Power" was re-conceptualized, à la Foucault, in the form of the old liberal view; power turned into a good or positive commodity which is possessed, processed, and used by everyone. Not surprisingly, the concept of "domination" and even "hegemony" was replaced by "difference." Questions of power rooted in "class," "gender" and "race" antagonisms were reduced to issues of diversity, difference and identity. The concept of "struggle" was fully abandoned and sometimes replaced with "resistance" or "transgression." The concept "exploitation" was fully discarded. Social theory was cleansed of all such "negative" or "subjective" concepts that had antagonized Wall Street, the IMF, WTO and their academic and media speakers. "Reality" and "materiality" turned into "discursive" and "linguistic constructions." All certainty about the world, including capitalist crises, exploitation, inequality, injustice, imperialism, and oppression had to give way to "uncertainty," "contingency," and "fluidity." While the gulf between the rich and the poor is widening throughout the world, academia has been celebrating the fall of all dichotomies and the erosion of all borders. This postmodernist grand

narrative and other "post-" theories were presented as the termination of all hitherto known epistemologies, theories and methodologies, especially Marxist ones. By the turn of the century, the domination of "post-" theories over the academy was certain. The curricula has turned largely postmodernist and cultural relativist. University presses and bookstores have stacked shelf after shelf with works of and about intellectuals of the past and present whose commitment or relevance to democracy, equality and socialism is, at best, questionable--Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, de Man, Foucault, Derrida, etc.

The realities of poverty and oppression, of ecocide and war are, however, too harsh; they force us into thinking and rethinking. If the leaders of the "Free World" and their financial institutions find it hard to listen to the voices of the protestors in the street, many academics find it equally difficult to ignore them. Some try to do more than listening; we can learn from social movements and discover new pedagogical possibilities; and there is no shortage of critical ideas, epistemologies, theories, practices, and achievements--Marx, Lenin, Luxemburg, Gramsci, Guevara, Freire, and Nyerere. In this brief review, I introduce some of the recent literature on education that offers an alternative to the capitalist status quo. This is not a review of the literature. It is intended to be an annotated bibliography. Nine titles are presented thematically.

Paula Allman is the author of the following two books: *Revolutionary Social Transformation: Democratic Hopes, Political Possibilities and Critical Education* (1999), Westport, Connecticut and London: Bergin & Garvey, 155 pages and *Critical Education Against Capitalism: Karl Marx and Revolutionary Critical Education* (2001), Westport, Connecticut and London: Bergin & Garvey, 275 pages. They are published in the "Critical Studies in Education and Culture Series" edited by Henry A. Giroux and forwarded by Peter McLaren. In both books, Allman situates her analysis of the contemporary world and the educational responses required to change it within the Marxist framework. Her views on Marxism are passionately stated and rigorously formulated. Allman not only advocates a Marxist dialectical-materialist reading of the lived world, but also shows how to use it as a method of writing and articulating one's thoughts. Her alternative to capitalism is clearly and passionately stated as socialism.

In the six chapters of *Revolutionary Social Transformation*, Allman provides an accessible analysis of Marx's theory of consciousness/praxis. The chapters are: Introduction: Rationale and Orientation; The Vision; Consciousness; Dialectical Conceptualization and Understanding Capitalism; Education and Social Transformation: The Ideas of Freire and Gramsci; and More on Visions: Re-Creating Our Concepts of Democracy, Truth and Equality. She also tries to rescue Freire and Gramsci from reformist appropriation, and argues that their ideas are essential for socialism. However, she urges us to use their ideas "not to dictate strategies but to inform and guide the development of a critical/revolutionary praxis based on a dialectical understanding of our present conditions." (1999:123).

In her book *Critical Education Against Capitalism: Karl Marx and Revolutionary Critical Education*, Allman shows why there is a need for "revolutionary critical education." She invites us to join her in a slightly more arduous journey, one that will take them [us] quite a distance toward 'critically reading' the world of global capitalism--far enough, in fact, to fully grasp the absurdity of capitalism and the impossibility of humanity's survival if it remains shackled to this inherently crisis-prone and totalizing system of social and economic injustice and domination. (2001: 3, emphasis in original)

The seven chapters of the book are: *Global Capital and the Human Condition: An Absurd Way of Begin a New Millennium*; *Unfolding the Essence of Capitalism-From the Simple Commodity to Global Social Domination: Capitalism, Part I*; *From Essence to Appearance: Capitalism, Part II*; *Ya*

Basta [Enough!] Challenging Capitalism in the New Millennium; Critical Education for Revolutionary Social Transformation; Freirean Critical Education in an Unlikely Context; and Toward the Abolition of Absurdity: Saying "No" to Capitalism. Peter McLaren, in his insightful foreword to the book, states that "in challenging the radical ahistoricity and anti-materialism of contemporary theories of education, Allman argues for a materialist praxis geared toward a global transformation" (2001 xiii).

Freire and Gramsci appear in the title of the next four books in this thematic cluster. In one of these titles Freire and Che Guevara appear together. These books are:

Diana Coben, Diana (1998). *Radical Heroes: Gramsci, Freire and the Politics of Adult Education*. New York: Garland, 260 pages;

Mayo, Peter. 1999. *Gramsci, Freire and Adult Education.' Possibilities for Transformative Action*. London: Zed Press, 211 pages;

McLaren, Peter. 2000. *Che Guevara, Paulo Freire, and the Pedagogy of Revolution*. Boston: Rowman & Littlefield, 220 pages; and

McLaren, Peter and Peter Leonard (eds.). 1996. *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter*. New York: Routledge, 194 pages.

Other features, however, set these books apart. Two titles, Coben's and Mayo's, specifically address adult education, while McLaren and Leonard's is an anthology. In a closer reading of each book, one can discern theoretical differences. Broadly put, I would argue that Mayo and Coben advocate a social democratic model for organizing social, cultural, political, and educational relations while McLaren in his treatment of Guevara and Freire presents revolutionary, critical education as a means of social transformation. In this sense, McLaren's text is closer to Allman's. Another distinguishing feature of these books is the depth of their analysis and the richness of the data. For Mayo and Coben, the work grew out of their doctoral thesis. McLaren has highlighted a new dimension to Che's revolutionary work, that is, its educational significance and relevance for today's struggle against the global hegemony of capitalism.

The last three books treated here are published by the members of the Hillcole Group. This is how the Group identifies itself:

The Hillcole Group was founded in 1989 by Dave Hill and Mike Cole at the Institute for Education Policy Studies. It is a group of Socialist practitioners and academics in education in Britain. Their aim is to improve the quality of schooling and teacher education; to confront the assaults by the radical right on the quality of education; and to influence policy and decision making on educational matters. (Mike Cole et al. 2001: 80)

These books are:

Cole, Mike, Dave Hill and Glen Rikowski in discussion with Peter McLaren. 2001. *Red Chalk: On Schooling, Capitalism and Politics*. Brighton' Institute for Education Policy Studies, 84 pages;

Rikowski, Glenn. 2001. *The Battle in Seattle: Its Significance for Education*. London: Tufnell, 60 page; and

Hill, Dave, Peter McLaren, Mike Cole and Glenn Rikowski. 1999. *Postmodernism in Educational Theory: Education and the Politics of Human Resistance*. London: Tufnell, 231 pages.

The educational agenda of the three books is clear; they concur with Allman that it is the role of education to create a realistic vision for change, a vision which is based on socialist transformation of the future, "a future where humanity is not dominated by capital" (Rikowski 2001: 43). They also argue that a truly critical pedagogy is the one which links critical to a project of socialist transformation (2001: 43).

The anthology on Postmodernism in Educational Theory offers a theoretical breakthrough in the

critique of postmodernist educational posturing. Rikowski and McLaren argue in the first chapter that "Postmodernism is an obstacle to the formation of open and radical perspectives which challenge inequalities and the deepening of the rule of capital in all areas of social life" (1999: 1). One of the goals of the book is to develop critical educational responses to the current crisis of capitalism by highlighting the contradictory role of education and training under capitalism. Two major themes are incorporated in the book: "the appraisal and critique of postmodernism within educational theory; and the explication of Marxist and socialist-feminist alternatives to postmodernism which highlight human resistance to capital and its associated forms of inequality" (1999: 6).

These books constitute, in my view, a turn or rather turning point in educational studies and, perhaps, in social sciences. If the hegemony of postmodern theory was associated with the rise of neo-conservative regimes of governance, the new trend coincides with the upsurge in social movements throughout the world. This literature is distinguished from that of "radical democracy" or "civil society" by its emphasis on socialism as the alternative to three centuries of capitalist order.

From the Marxist perspective, capitalism has achieved the goal of establishing its social, economic, and political order. The replacement of feudalism and other pre-capitalist formations by capitalism was a liberating or progressive development. Soon after the assumption of power in the Netherlands, US, France, and Britain in the late eighteenth century, bourgeois democracy betrayed its limitations. It was indeed a true democracy, though for propertied White men only. This regime was consolidated in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The limitations of this democracy were laid bare in the wave of revolutions in 1848 in Europe, the Paris Commune of 1871, and the beginning of liberation movements in the colonies.

Even before the bourgeoisie assumed state power, its Enlightenment political philosophers proposed legal equality as the basis of the future regime. This did not happen, however. Women, half the population, were denied full citizenship; the indigenous peoples, slaves, non-Whites, and non-propertied Whites were non-citizens. As Ahmad (2000: 51) has noted on the occasion of the turn of century, today's "actually existing democracy," that is, formal equality "has been achieved not by the bourgeoisie but by those workers, peasants, women, colonised peoples, subordinated castes and ethnic groups, the non-white victims of European racism whom the bourgeoisie has sought to exclude from the democratic project."

The Enlightenment political philosopher Rousseau raised the question of the conflict between liberty and inequality. More than two centuries of bourgeois democratic rule should help us understand that formal equality does not end the intertwined inequalities, those of class, race, and gender.

While capitalism succeeded in establishing its order worldwide, socialism failed. The 1917 revolution in Russia and the 1949 revolution in China, not to mention many other efforts, all failed. In spite of many initial achievements, state capitalism took the reigns of power. This is one of the many features that distinguish socialism from capitalism. Capitalism emerged spontaneously out of the declining feudal order; in spite of the enormous struggle of the Renaissance and Enlightenment thinkers against the medieval regime, the establishment of capitalist economy was not a consciously planned enterprise. Capitalism, in fact, shared with feudalism the exploitation of labouring classes. This is one of the many features that distinguish socialism from capitalism. By contrast, as Marxist theory has emphasized, socialism does not emerge spontaneously out of capitalism. The building of a socialist economy, culture, society and politics is a fully conscious effort. While the crucial role of consciousness explains, to a large extent, the failure of previous

steps, it also highlights the role of education in the transition from pre-history to history. In Marx's "politics of historical vision," according to Best, As a form of class society, capitalism stands in continuity with all past societies; it is "the last antagonistic form of the social process of production" and prepares to bring "the prehistory of human society" to a close (Marx 1978: 5). Communism inaugurates both the end of (alienated) history and the beginning of (nonalienated, free) history. (1995: 42)

Such a transition from pre-history to history can only be a conscious struggle. Education has adequately served the production and reproduction of capitalism. The books introduced here tell us of a different approach to education. The authors try to liberate education itself so that it can contribute to the building of a world that not only socialists but many others have built in their utopian visions--a world free of oppression.

The task of the new generation of Marxist theorists in education is formidable. They have to offer a revolutionary critique of the current state of social theory. At the same time, they have to meet the standards of scholarship established by Marx: dialectical thinking, passion for justice, rigor, depth, universalism, and optimism. It seems that the authors of these studies are prepared to meet these challenges.

#### References

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By Shahrzad Mojab

***Shahrzad Mojab is editor of *Convergence* and professor at the Department of Adult Education, Community Development and Counselling Psychology, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto. Her most recent book, co-authored with Afsaneh Hojabri, is *Women of Iran: A Subject Bibliography* (2000). She can be contacted at <[smojab@oise.utoronto.ca](mailto:smojab@oise.utoronto.ca)>.***

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