

Education for Social Change or for Capital Crisis Resolution

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Introduction

The simple yet complex reality that we have to face is that capitalism actually survives and thrives on economic crises; that crises act as circuit breakers in capitalism's head long rush to self-destruction; and that expansion is the chief means of resolving them. Paradoxically, therefore it can be said that whatever its intensity and wherever it occurs at a local or global level, a crisis functions as a stimulus driving capital accumulation and expansion. The cumulative effect is that today there are few avenues of human activity and social life, including education and associated information services, which are beyond subservience to the absurd and irrational whirlpool of capitalism's dynamics.

This is the key issue confronting those who seek to develop a practical theory of education for social change, and who see that there are possibilities for a more socially oriented existence beyond the limits of the horizon set by capitalism, and are determined to work towards it.

As a contribution towards this project this article presents a critical account of the dynamics within capitalism which are driving education towards marketisation and its exploitation as a crisis management strategy for capital. In this task I draw on Marx's critique of capital and on the analyses of those Marxists (Harvey, 1982; Mandel, 1968; and Rubin, 1972) who have sought to extend his analysis within the historical materialist frame of reference, and to complement the critical discourses, for instance, on government business policies for education (Allen et al, 1999), on equity (Hill and Cole, 2001), social justice (Fitzclarence and Kenway, 1993), pedagogy critique (McLaren and Farahmandpur, 1999), ideology critique (Hill et al, 1999), resistance critique (Rikowski, G. 2001), and the impact of trade policies on information services (Rikowski, R. 2005).

Towards the Marketisation of Education

Marketisation under the conditions specific to the capitalist economy or mode of production is a process in which things are severed from their social connections and transformed into reified, atomised units of measure. In the process they acquire the property of exchangeability, of exchange value; the only form in which their value can be converted into money capital, which is the whole point of the exercise.

The separation, or alienation, of things as discrete entities from their social settings, which explain their nature and their existence, is a precondition for their commodification and privatisation within the capitalist economic system. It is therefore an important part of understanding the current directions of educational change to refer to education's historical development. The development can be seen as a series of transitional phases which if current trends are maintained will see education's integration into the economy as a capitalist mode of education (Raduntz, 2001, p.317ff).

Education's historical record shows that from its beginnings it has been inextricably bound up with class divisions serving the interests of the ruling elites, and that though in the modern era a trend can be detected towards education's social democratisation it still remains linked to interests of capitalism's ruling elites.

At the beginning of the modern era with the disintegration of feudalism and the influx of new learning into Europe pressures mounted which challenged the church's monopoly on education. Thus began its separation as a function within the institutional setting of the medieval church and its reconstitution into schools and universities solely dedicated to education.

At the same time there began the segmentation of the body of knowledge into discrete disciplines which Mészáros (1970, p. 109ff) links to the alienating influence of the capitalist economy. In these forms each discipline acquired marketable value rated according to its usefulness upon which the salaries and stipends of teachers could be determined. For example, in the emerging market economy professors of highly valued medicine and rhetoric could command the highest salaries, philosophers the lowest (Ganss, 1956, p.39). In the case of hiring a schoolmaster in the town of Treviso the knowledge to be taught was graded in terms of degrees of difficulty so that pay scales could be fixed according to a pupil's degree of attainment. The value of category one, the 'elementary

stuff', therefore was worth, say, half a ducat, while the value of the more difficult categories attracted higher pay (Ariès, 1973, p.174).

At this stage the provision of education took on local and regional characteristics and was spread across a range of informal domestic and formal independent settings. It was from these existing provisions of education that the emerging capitalist economy was able to draw for artisans' labour and the science and technology that were to become the basis of its economic growth.

In the industrial revolution period such was its success, derived from the application of newly created scientific knowledge and technology that pressure mounted for the technical efficiency these engendered to be applied in the systematic provision of education. Modelled on organisational arrangements similar to those existing in commerce and industry, national education systems were set up by state authorities mainly because in capitalism's formative years the scale of education required to support the phenomenal growth of the economy demanded funding beyond the resources of private investment capital. An additional factor was that the private provision of education could not supply the number of skilled workers, scientists and bureaucrats that a nation's burgeoning industries and state instrumentalities required.

In this regard, the Prussian education initiative in the early nineteenth century provided a model which gave Germany an economic advantage and which other European nations sought to emulate (Musgrave, 1967). Prussia's initiative also included the setting up of the state sponsored University of Berlin with a mandate of free inquiry without government interference, and the provision of teacher training. An appreciation that too much teacher education, however, might pose a danger to their conservative regimes was something that dominated education reforms by subsequent reactionary governments.

As a result of these developments education generally became highly systematised, centralised and bureaucratically administered as a state monopoly. As the economy continued to expand, however, and the cost of education grew, all sectors of education, private and public, universities, vocational education and formal education became subject in varying degrees to state regulation and funding. From a function monopolised by the medieval church therefore, education since has become reconstituted as a state monopoly. The next step, I submit, is the integration of education's potentially profitable sectors into the economy as capitalism reaches its maturity as a global market regulated economy, and this will

mean a modification in its structure characterised by centralisation and decentralisation.

Corresponding to the development of what may be termed an instrumental approach to education has been developments in the theory and practice of education motivated by humanist ideals which see education as a means of developing human potentialities and advancing the creation of a society that would reflect what proponents considered to be the freedom intrinsic to what it is to be human (see Bowen, 1981, p.440ff). A project of this kind required universal access to education, a focus on the creation and acquisition of knowledge, and the exercise of critical reasoning as the means of achieving this end.

In the development of modern education therefore there has been a countervailing undertow which lately has emphasised citizenship values (see Marginson, 1997a).

The expansionary economic conditions of the post World War II era under the regime of Keynesian economic management policies conspired to bring the economic and social imperatives of modern education together. For education was seen as a means not only of personal development fulfilling the aspirations of the majority of people for a better future but also of national and global economic development. Under these circumstances government education expenditure occupied a large slice of the gross national product reflecting education's growing prominence in guaranteeing an ever-expanding economy (Bowen, 1981, p.526ff).

During the 1960s, as education became increasingly utilitarian to the detriment of the ideals of human development, dissent among tertiary students reached boiling point, particularly in France. Following the economic crisis of the 1970s, however, the utilitarian trend became more marked as reflected increasingly in the proletarianisation and deteriorating conditions of teachers' work (Ozga and Lawn, 1988). It gathered momentum as state policies under the influence of New Right ideology particularly in English speaking nations, began to restructure their education systems to become more flexible and responsive to the needs of their economies in the face of competition and free trade on a global scale.

The restructuring of education systems, particularly those organised and administered by the state, has for the most part followed the models adopted by transnational corporations which has seen the retention of central fiscal, policy-making and administrative control while at the same time effecting the decentralisation of their

divisions into semi autonomous competing units of productive activity.

This brief historical excursion is designed to facilitate an understanding of the rationale underlying education's reconstitution as a capitalist enterprise which is to be found in contemporary capitalism's attempts to overcome its current economic dilemmas, and of the role that these crises are playing in determining the direction of education's development.

The Inner Dynamics of the Capitalist Economy

A historical overview of education reveals elements of correspondence between developments in education and in the capitalist economy. What has now to be revealed is the nature of the current economic crisis and how this is affecting educational change. For the exercise the following analysis draws on Marx's critique of capital in which he employs the value relation as his governing principle and the relation between the forces and social relations of production as his organising framework.

In his opening analysis of capital Marx establishes that the source and substance of value which permits the exchange and equalisation of commodities of different kinds is the amount of abstract labour expended in their production carried out under specific social conditions in which 'private individuals or groups of individuals...carry on their work independently of each other' (Marx, 1954, p.77).

Marx also establishes that because the market implies a process of equalisation then the source of capital expansion cannot but occur in the sphere of production. Furthermore, in production there exist social relations of exploitation, and therefore inequality, arising from historical conditions in which a class of workers is forced to sell its labour power to a class of capitalists who possess the purchasing power of capital. For Marx, the relationship between capital and wage labour encapsulates the primary social relation which forms the basis of capital accumulation and expansion and therefore characterises the capitalist economy.

In the sphere of production the expansion of capital begins with the extraction by an enterprise of surplus value by the simple expedient of hiring individual workers for a set period, say, of eight hours and setting them to work to produce commodities for the purpose not of fulfilling human needs but for market exchange and profit. By

employing a number of strategies, structuring and managing the labour process more efficiently and raising labour's productivity for instance, the enterprise can recoup its labour costs in six hours and accrue to itself the value, as a surplus, of the commodities produced in the remaining unpaid two hours (Marx, 1954, p.188). As an expression of an amount of surplus labour time the surplus value is then realised as an expansion on the original capital invested in production when the commodities are sold on the market. By way of illustration, in a contract between de Jelly, master-weaver, and one Nicholas Cornélis in 1634, there is stated bluntly that the latter will be paid half of what he makes, the other half being the master's profit (Mandel, 1968, p.132).

It can be appreciated that an enterprise will want to maximise the surplus value component of the value materialised in the commodities produced and will therefore concentrate on improving efficiencies and productivity. While these circumstances have the potential to lift economic growth the sale of the commodities produced and their value realised as money capital can be problematic if they cannot be sold for a variety of reasons. There is therefore a potential for an economic crisis because the whole purpose of the exercise, the accumulation and expansion of capital, is disrupted.

In order to grasp the dynamics entailed in the production and exchange of commodities it needs to be appreciated that on Marx's account (1954, p.529; and 1967a, pp.41-42) capital is a circulating process in which production and exchange are moments. Through the medium of money, and beginning with exchange, money capital is invested to purchase labour power and means of production. Capital, in the form of production capital, traverses through the labour process in which means of production are converted into commodities as materialised value containing the capital originally invested plus a surplus value. Finally, the commodities are brought to the market, sold and their value realised as expanded money capital. And so the process begins in a continuous round of reproduction and accumulation.

As a way of illustrating the dynamics involved not only within the spheres of production and exchange but in the relationship between them, we can follow an enterprise as it seeks to make a profit.

In the sphere of exchange an enterprise faces competition and uncertainty and therefore must grab as large a market share as it can. This can be done in the sphere of production by producing commodities more efficiently and productively and therefore at a cheaper price in order to undercut the prices of competitors. The

enterprise makes an above average profit because the cheaper prices not only corner the existing market but also stimulate greater demand against what are now the dearer prices of competitors.

As the enterprise's production expands to meet the new level of demand the enterprise attracts capital investment and the labour which is now surplus to the requirements of competitors whose production has been forced to contract. Enjoying above average profit is only temporary for our enterprise, however, because in order to avoid bankruptcy competitors must themselves follow the lead and introduce cost saving strategies and technology similar to those employed by our enterprise. The effect, however, is not to grant above average profits to all enterprises but to restore the profit margin to its average level so that each enterprise is forced to renew efforts mainly through technological change to grab above average profits. In these circumstances, there is an enforced continuous leapfrogging among enterprises as new technologies are adopted independently of the will of any particular capital enterprise because in the final analysis the expansion of capital depends on above average profit-making (Harvey, 1982, pp.120-121).

In the sphere of production one of the means open to an enterprise in augmenting its market share is to raise labour's productivity through technological innovation and change. The strategy has the effect not only of lowering the value of labour power and therefore the unit price per commodity thrown on the market but also of requiring organisational change to conform to the new production regime which the technology has created. The raising of productivity to save labour constitutes one of capitalism's basic contradictions because the effect of introducing technological efficiencies is to reduce the input of the very labour power which creates the surplus value on which capital expansion depends.

For the enterprise the technology of mechanisation together with scientific management techniques and segmented detail work regimes affords it greater control over the labour process so that it can be organised to accord closely with the needs of capital not the worker (Braverman, 1974). Such efficiencies include the systematic separation of mental and manual labour and the subdivision of work processes into constituent specialised and therefore limited and detailed operations. The upside for the enterprise is that the mobilisation and concentration of science and technology in the hands of management provides it with the organising ability and capacity to revolutionise production almost at will.

The downside, however, is that with the restructuring of the workplace the enterprise is continually confronted with the

antagonism of workers who are faced with the falling value of their wages, the threat of lay-offs, and the progressive deterioration of their working conditions; for example the erosion of autonomy over their work practices, the intensification of their work and reduction or obsolescence of their skills as they become mere appendages in a mechanised labour process. Marx (1954, p. 372ff) and Braverman (1974) have recorded the deleterious effects of these developments on workers.

Paradoxically, however, besides competition worker antagonism in production can also constitute a motivational factor for an enterprise to introduce further technological change and restructuring of the workplace.

While an enterprise can control to a certain extent the conditions in the workplace the chaotic and uncertain conditions in the market place is another matter. These conditions are reflected in the daily price fluctuations which are a feature of commodity trading. If circulation through production and exchange is taken as a whole we can see why capitalism thrives and survives on the chaos and uncertainty which are features of capitalist commodity exchange.

On the market while prices fluctuate daily it can be noted that over time they oscillate around an average price which in idealised circumstances would be proportional to the value of the labour-time materialised in the commodities being exchanged. This would establish a state of equilibrium throughout the economy because it would reflect the equal distribution of labour among enterprises according to demand.

In the capitalist economy, however, the average price is proportional to the costs of production for a given product plus the average profit on the capital invested (Rubin, 1972, p.63ff). Furthermore, because the capitalist economy is supply rather than demand driven and because its division of labour consists of producers working independently and separately from each other there is no one controlling the distribution of labour and individual producers have no way of gauging how much to produce or how much their competitors are producing. There is therefore the constant tendency to overproduce or underproduce.

In this event, if demand does not rise to meet supply, then overproduction and a corresponding fall in prices will occur. Consequently, as production contracts, in response the capital and labour surplus to requirements will gravitate towards those enterprises enjoying a period of expansion. The reverse is the case for underproduction. The see-saw distribution of capital and labour allows expanding enterprises to produce above average surplus

value and thereby to realise above average profits at the expense of contracting enterprises. The effect is to create conditions of disequilibrium, instability and uncertainty on the market which paradoxically at the same time are the very conditions necessary if capital is to accumulate and expand.

Taken as a whole we can see how the imperative for individual enterprises constantly to revolutionise their forces and social relations of production, while stimulating economic growth and profit-making, can at the same time jeopardise the continuing reproduction of capital accumulation. The market is the only mechanism available to correct the threat to continuing capital accumulation in the absence of any regulation of production (a circumstance which would contravene the freedom of producing enterprises). In planning their production targets, enterprises are influenced only by the market where their products are equalized, and it becomes clear as indicated by the rise or fall in prices that supply has outstripped demand. In this case, enterprises are induced to contract or expand their production. In this event the threat posed by instability is averted and a state of equilibrium temporarily established.

The foregoing account has sought to show how instability paradoxically stimulate as well as threaten economic growth in a roller coaster pattern. In this pattern uncertainty and instability follow certainty and stability while at the same time sustaining the social relations based on private property on which capitalism depends. This pattern is punctuated by economic crises which constitute the mechanism impelling capitalism's reproduction and development despite the chaotic conditions of capital expansion.

The Expansion of Capitalism: The Ultimate in Crisis Management Resolution

Capitalism's development is characterised by periodic crises derived from the unlimited development of the forces of production through constant technological change which continually presses against the barrier of capitalism's social relations. In these circumstances the cycle of accumulation comes to a halt. The ensuing economic stagnation is expressed in the forms of overproduction, speculative investment, crises, unemployment and overaccumulation of non-invested capital (Harvey, 1982, p.190).

The causes of economic crises internal to the working of capitalism are many and varied which include factors within the spheres of

production (machinery breakdown, strikes by workers, delays in deliveries of raw materials) or exchange (poor consumer demand; inflationary price fluctuations, problems associated with credit and insolvency), and in the circulation between and within the spheres of production and exchange (slow turnover times due to inefficiencies in transport, trade barriers, and the slow pace of or inadequate structural reform).

The crises cause the devaluation of labour power and skills together with the devaluation, depreciation, even destruction, of existing capital values invested in means of production, machinery and in fixed assets. The economic wastage is enormous and the repercussions socially devastating which find expression in political and social conflict and tensions.

The wastage in labour and the devaluation of surplus capital, however, paradoxically serve to provide the basis for a recovery of the accumulation cycle by clearing away obsolete technologies, practices and structures and instituting structural adjustments, rationalisations and reforms, new monetary systems, new policy structures and new organisational forms (Harvey, 1982, p. 431).

Although many social institutions and organisational structures, what Harvey calls social infrastructures, particularly those under state control like education for instance, are not directly productive in terms of capital accumulation, nevertheless capital value in the form of revenue circulates through and is modulated by them. They become part of capitalism's continuous exploration and modification of organisational arrangements which can alleviate and contain the tensions arising from capitalism's inner dynamics. The circulation of value through social infrastructures on this account can be regarded as momentary circuits in the total accumulation process. Such flows for instance have supported scientific research and development (see Harvey, 1982, p.398ff).

Economic crises thus reveal dual functions not only of devaluing and destroying the 'old' but also of preparing the ground for economic recovery and the 'new' in a continuous round of economic instability and stability. In this way, the crises mediate a 'space' between production and exchange in which the forces and the social relations of production can adjust to and resolve the tensions between each other, for unlimited development of the forces of production creates stress which can be overcome only by restructuring organisational arrangements. However, if the basic class relation remains unaltered, the contradictions between the forces and the social relations of production are not resolved but merely displaced and recreated on a different plane (Harvey, 1982, p.326).

In capitalism's history, economic crises have given rise to what may be described as crisis management strategies which, like the crises from which they emerge, have the dual function of resolving instability on the one hand and of stimulating economic recovery on the other. To illustrate: credit and finance capital can play a positive role in providing loans to further economic expansion. In the form of debt, however, credit can cause bankruptcy as well as stimulate speculative fever to the point of economic collapse. A reserve army of unemployed for instance as cheap labour can form the basis of recovery to counter the inflationary pressures which scarce and expensive labour power can help to create. Furthermore, organisational arrangements can provide a degree of stability yet also pose a barrier to ongoing development and economic growth. Furthermore, monopoly corporations and centralised banking facilities have emerged as a way of coping with economic crises and uncertainty. The state and its instrumentalities, the ideological apparatuses and education systems also serve the same dual functions.

In contemporary capitalism, according to Mandel (1975, p.562) and as foreshadowed by Marx (1967b, p.266), the consequences of the contradiction between the enormous economic growth which the capitalist market economy has spawned, and the limitations and therefore the barriers imposed on it by its private property relations has reached critical and explosive proportions not only within nations but spreading globally. The tensions created are manifested in the rapid succession of economic crises, the growing disparity between rich and poor and the escalation of social conflict and economic instability and strife.

The capitalist system is responding in the only way it knows how, by accelerating the development and dispersal of information technology, investing huge amounts of capital in technological innovation, research and development, and last but not least in armaments manufacture, constantly and with increasing speed restructuring all facets of the economy, breaking down the barriers to free trade and competition globally and penetrating all sectors of social life (Mandel, 1975, pp.387-88). Above all, however, it is becoming evident that crisis management techniques based on Taylor's principles of scientific management are being applied to and invading sectors of social life, education for instance, as these are subjected to the processes of marketisation.

The Direction of Educational Change

It is within the matrix of capitalism's contradictions and the role played by economic crises that the current direction of educational change can be understood. For education has, in the current period of capitalism's development, taken centre stage as a crisis management strategy in its roles as a productive force, as a consumer of surplus capital, and as a means of warehousing (see Shor, 1980) and rotating surplus labour through cycles of employment and unemployment in a life-long educative process. Furthermore, it has become significant in terms of its role in research, in staff development and training in order to ameliorate the excesses and social stresses of constant organisational restructuring, and in assisting employees to adapt to the needs of their employers under these circumstances.

These roles can be effective only if education is closely tied and is responsive to the economy's swiftly changing needs and this means education's marketisation and integration into the market economic regime itself. In this event education becomes subject to all the contradictions, instability and uncertainty that are inherent in the capitalist economy and which have plagued its development. It will also mean the introduction into education of those working conditions and its subjection to the rapid succession of structural changes which are a feature of capitalism in its contemporary development.

The recognition of education as a productive force has since the 1940s emerged out of capitalism's growing dependence on technological innovation not only in the development of electronically controlled automation (Mandel 1975, p.207) but also in what is considered to be the new basis of economic growth, information technology. The growing dependence on these technologies has seen a shift away from manual to intellectual labour in the corporate workplace. It has also seen increasingly massive investments in and the structuring of science, technological innovation and research as specific business enterprises structured and rationalised on a capitalist basis. In turn these developments have created an enormous demand for highly skilled intellectual labour power which accounts for the expansion of the tertiary education sector in the 1950s.

As the cumulative growth of science and the greater acceleration of research and development gains momentum capitalist processes of increasing division of labour, rationalisation and specialisation in the drive for private profit penetrate the spheres of intellectual labour and scientific education (Mandel, 1975, pp.249, and pp.261-63).

There follows the proletarianisation of intellectual labour and the instrumentalisation of curricula where humanities barely rate as qualifications are tailored to specific labour process needs.

These developments can be ascribed to the enormous build up of private surplus capital which puts pressure on a cash strapped government funded education system as a means of absorbing the excess capital and thereby promoting economic recovery. In these circumstances education is doubly lucrative for it also provides opportunities for educational goods, for consultancy and professional development services, curricula packages and for information technology. There is also the potential exchange value represent in the repositories of information and knowledge in library facilities (Rikowski, 2001/2002).

As education becomes remodelled along business lines features common to commodity production, mechanisation, standardisation, over specialisation and the parcellisation of labour will increasingly penetrate education as it is in other sectors of social life (Mandel, 1975, p.387).

It is perhaps in the area of crisis management, in the overall containment of capitalism's internal contradictions, however, that education plays a significant role, a role that is hitherto somewhat under researched.

Conclusion

There is little doubt that the direction of educational change is heading towards its direct integration into the capitalist economy. It is possible to recognise in the changes those features which characterise the commodification and marketisation processes necessary for the production and realisation of surplus value as capital.

What the analysis has shown, moreover, is that in the process education becomes another tool in capitalism's crisis management armoury involved in stimulating economic growth on the one hand, and simultaneously absorbing the surplus capital that accrues from that growth on the other. In other words, education is being shaped for capital.

The analysis also reveals the inner nature of capitalism's inner dynamics governing its development to be, as Harvey (1982, p.203) and Marx before him have observed, cold, ruthless and inexorable, responding only to the law of the market. Yet, as a social relation

capitalism is a product of human historical development which has come to dominate, dehumanise and delimit human existence and freedom. Set against this are the aspirations for education raised by these very processes as an instrument of human and social development which its marketisation would appear to compromise.

The practical question then becomes how might the current trends in education through educational research and effective action be employed positively in order, not to pose an alternative within the existing capitalist social relations, but to overcome them so that the possibility of a society which is not driven by the private profit motive might be realised.

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