

Education for a Socialist Future: An E-Dialogue

Rich Gibson

San Diego State University, California, USA

Glenn Rikowski

University of Northampton, UK

This e-dialogue was conducted by email between 19th July and 8th August 2004, and between 6th March and 8th March 2005. Brief editing and some minor additions were made during September 2006.

[On General Education] Citizen Marx said there was a peculiar difficulty connected with this question. On the one hand a change of social circumstances was required to establish a proper system of education, on the other hand a proper system of education was required to bring about a change of social circumstances; we must therefore commence where we were. (Karl Marx, Speech on General Education to the General Council Meeting of the International Workingmen's Association, 17th August 1869)

Every time we criticise changes being made, we must suggest what changes are required instead. It is much harder to do... (Caroline Benn and Clyde Chitty, 1999, p.39)

GLENN: First of all Rich, I think that it's best to acknowledge that there are problems regarding the two of us talking about education in socialism. One is that there is no agreement regarding the nature of socialism, and so trying to outline an education for socialism is a non-starter. Secondly, it could be argued that a couple of teachers like us outlining 'the education of the future' runs against the notion that any programme for education in socialism (or in a transitional epoch) must be the result of *collective* and *democratic* discussions, educational practice and political action. Are we not just a couple of teachers, educational activists and thinkers spinning ideas about education in socialism: why should anyone take notice of what we say? A third point is that education in socialism, like socialism itself, is simply unimaginable. We are both locked into capitalist society, and our capacity to visualise anything beyond it, such as socialist society and an education for socialism is impossible. No doubt there are many other objections to what we are up to here. However, I would like to think there is a way through at least some of this. A friend of mine, Richard Shepherd (1993), argued that after the fall

of the Berlin Wall and the transformation of the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc from state socialist or state capitalist (take your pick) societies into a capitalist ones, folks would want detail about what socialism would be like. They would want to know more about what they were committing themselves too. Paula Allman (1999) has argued that at its best, and when carried out with reference to the spirits of Freire and Gramsci, radical pedagogy could give students and teachers a *glimpse* of what education in socialism was like. Indeed, Allman argued that we have to be able to do this if people are ever going to be convinced that socialist education and socialism are real possibilities and truly desirable futures. What are your thoughts on these issues, Rich?

RICH: Geeze, Glenn! Those are four big questions. I'd like to start by saying that I am honoured to share this discussion with you. Your works, Dave Hill's, Paula Allman's, all have been challenging, and in many ways formative, to me and for our colleagues in the Rouge Forum. Your work on the question of value, especially in education, is a breakthrough. I will try to respond to each of your vital questions in order, though clearly each thought flows into and from the other.

GLENN: Thanks Rich. The honour is mutual, and Dave Hill tells me about the important work going on in the Rouge Forum and about the annual conferences (which he's been to), which attract radical practitioners, education activists and critical educators. Of course, I follow things through your Rouge Forum updates by email, and your material on the war in Iraq has forced me to rethink the relations between imperialism and education. So what do you make of my points?

RICH: First, on socialism: I think it failed and we need to build a critical understanding of what went wrong. What will be can only come from what has been, with some imaginative leaps, so the huge struggle for socialism, which cost the lives of millions of honest people and which despite its failure still stands as a high-watermark of humanism, is key to understanding where we want to go.

GLENN: But Rich, this implies that we need to say what we think socialism was, or is – and where actually existing forms of socialism, or attempts at creating socialism, took a wrong turn.

RICH: Yes Glenn, and for me socialism was (1) the continuation of the state, in the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat, as a site of class struggle (2) with the Party in the lead, purportedly acting in the interest of the working classes and the peasantry (3) as a result of a revolution (meaning I do not think there is a way to vote away capitalism), for the purpose of winning a more humane, free, egalitarian, and democratic world.

Because brevity must be a concern, let me compact history a great deal and say I believe the key efforts for revolution were the Paris Commune, the Russian revolution, the Chinese revolution, and the Cuban revolution. Each of these battles built on the other.

The Paris Commune, brief as it was, set up the principles of socialism in practical ways (smashing the existing state, no elected officials paid more than average workers, immediate recall of elected officials, a working – as opposed to a bureaucratic – government, quasi-soviets in power, the necessity of an armed people, etc.). The Russian revolution demonstrated that a socialist revolution could rise up in the midst of an imperialist war, face massive attacks, and sustain itself – if briefly. The Chinese revolution again demonstrated the relationship of imperialist war and revolution, and deepened (1) the idea of a mass party, (2) the role of a peoples' army, fairly egalitarian and democratic, and peoples' (guerrilla) war, (3) questions about dialectical materialism and making the philosophy of praxis a mass issue, and (4) the role of class struggle, and consciousness, post-revolution. The Cuban revolution showed that a revolution was possible even at the fingertips of the Empire, and the potential role of socialist education for a new kind of humanity.

Each revolution elevated human history. Yet each, I think, collapsed. On one hand, each failed to successfully address the production and appropriation of surplus value, to overcome capitalist economic relations. Each revolutionary socialist party was – at least initially – honest about this. The Soviets openly announced the New Economic Policy as a retreat to capitalism. The Chinese called their move to party-led capitalism New Democracy. Now they are joined by the Cubans in promoting Market Socialism. In each instance (other than the Paris Commune which was crushed), the leading party itself chose to return to capitalist economic relations, believing that it was necessary in order to create the abundance which would serve as a basis for more egalitarian policies – later.

On the other hand, each of the socialist parties conducted massive educational campaigns about the nature of capitalism (from surplus value to imperialist war and all in between) and the promise of socialism as a form of egalitarian democracy – where decision-making power, production and distribution would be held in the hands of those who did the work. While the people of Russia, China, and Cuba all did, in a variety of ways, protest the aggravating restoration of capitalist relations, and the establishment of the Party as a ruling class, it remains that for the most part capitalism was restored in full view of the people – who let it happen.

So, those of us who are interested in the promise of socialism, that is, the possibility of a more humane world run democratically, fairly, without exploitation, need to consider that what people learned from socialist education was not enough, that socialist education did not fully address either what people needed to know, or the critical pedagogical issue: how they needed to come to know it. One would, after all, influence the other.

GLENN: And what about my second point Rich, on why people should take any notice of us?

RICH: Well Glenn, to paraphrase the other Marx, Groucho, I am not sure I would want to pay much attention to anyone who paid too much attention to me. That said, however, let us look at concrete circumstances. This is a world whose major powers are promising their youth perpetual war. Inequality is booming, as are many forms of irrationalism (racism, nationalism, religious fundamentalism, sexism, etc). An international war of the rich on the poor is producing new forms of fascism on every continent. At the same time, the world is more united than ever before, through systems of production, exchange, transportation, technology, and communications. Everything is there for all to live fairly well, if we chose to share. This contradiction is not acceptable. Indeed, there is no alternative but to discover a path to get rid of capitalism, to create a humane world where people can truly lead reasonably free, creative, connected lives in sharing communities.

GLENN: How does education come into this project, Rich?

RICH: Education is key, not only in creating the base of understanding, through critical analysis of existing social relations, to offer a ground for a leap of imagination beyond daily life, but also because education, schooling, is now structurally pivotal to some of the most powerful imperial players, like the US.

GLENN: What are the relations between schools and imperialism in your view, Rich?

RICH: Well Glenn, in de-industrialised North America, I believe schools, not industrial work places nor the military nor the tax system, are the focal organising places of most peoples' lives. Of course, schools offer skill training (literacy, etc), and ideological training (nation building). Schools are huge markets. They involve billions of dollars of exchange (textbooks, salaries, architects, buses, buildings, etc), and they warehouse kids, a vital tax free corporate benefit in a society whose economy created one-parent families, or requires two people working to win the salary of what one person earned twenty-five years ago. Most importantly, schools are centres of hope which is probably the main reason people send their kids to us, strangers. Hope, though, can be real or false. In

any case, there are now more than 49 million children in US schools (more than 25 times the number of people in the military), and about 24 million of them will be eligible for an economic or political military draft in the next five years. Schools are crucial in creating youths that will die for imperial profits.

GLENN: But from what I've read of your work, teachers can make a difference, right?

RICH: Absolutely! What I've outlined above is not *all* that goes on in schools, or need go on. Good teachers swim against the current every day, teaching from the understanding that students are capable of comprehending and changing the world. Teachers do not have to be missionaries for capitalism and some, though far too few are not. These are, after all, *capitalist* schools and they are not semi-autonomous sites, though they are contested sites of class struggle, every day. Even so, it is capitalism that is semi-autonomous. Its schools are not.

So, education is key to things as they are, and to changing things to what they *might be*. Education is integral to sustaining any changes that might be won by poor and working people. Education has also been key to revolutionary projects in progress, as in South Africa, or perhaps more modestly, in the Mississippi Freedom Schools in the early 1960's, the Black Panther Party schools connected to their free breakfast programs, etc.

GLENN: But from what you've said Rich, although at present we learn and teach in capitalist schools, in capitalist society, things can change, too.

RICH: Yeah, things change: we can be sure of that. It's not unreasonable to say that while we do sit surrounded by the processes of capital, we know that this is not the highest or final stage of human development, and as we can, to some degree, become conscious of how things change, we can then influence what is next. Indeed, we will do that wittingly or not. The way out of capitalism must at once address the totality of human creativity and the particular methods that are used to imprison it. No one can reasonably suggest a grasp of the totality, or, hence, all of its components. But it is possible, recognising the simultaneously absolute and relative nature of truth, to go out the door and take informed, critically conscious, action.

GLENN: So Rich, coming round to the really tough one: what might an education system look like in a future society?

RICH: Well Glenn, I suppose that depends on how that society has developed, what it is and wants to be. If it is a society that has just experienced a successful uprising, education will look much different from a society that has achieved real community – as the earlier

society will certainly be under extreme internal and external military, economic, political, and social pressure. Yet Glenn, I think either education system must address the question Marx raises in his third Thesis on Feuerbach:

The materialist doctrine concerning the changing of circumstances and upbringing forgets that circumstances are changed by men and that it is essential to educate the educator himself. This doctrine must, therefore, divide society into two parts, one of which is superior to society.

The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-changing can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice. (Thesis 3, Marx, 1845, p. 615)

I believe this addresses the issues of *transformation* and *self-transformation* that educators face every day quite well.

GLENN: Yes Rich: social and individual transformation are not just 'something for the future'. Marx said that communism was the 'real movement' of society, not a fixed state of affairs, and these movements of social and individual transformation are something we can get stuck into today, now.

RICH: Both Georg Lukacs and Paulo Freire wrote highly significant last books. Lukacs' *Tailism and the Dialectic, in defence of history and class consciousness* (2000), drives home three key ideas that Freire's last work, *Pedagogy of Freedom* (1998), takes up as well. Freire's book, unfortunately, is available in English only in a terrible translation, and he died before he could finish the editing.

GLENN: So what's the connection, Rich?

RICH: In each instance, two things are clear from the two writers. First, overcoming the contradiction of subject and object – the self-actualising person making their own history, in circumstances they did not make – requires the conscious action of the critically curious subject. Second, justice demands organisation. Only through a revolutionary political organisation can such conscious actions become truly a *movement*. Third, within this, "revolutionary passion," is vital, key (Lukacs, 2000, p.67). However Glenn, I do not share Lukacs', or Freire's, sense of what the organisation should look like – or at least not Lukacs' tacit support of Stalin's Russia, and Freire's leadership in the Workers Party of Brazil, about to recreate all the old problems of socialism. Still, I think their common idea is correct. The *negation of the negation*, the idea that things change and what is new is always in re-creation, and that the profound optimism built within it requires organisation.

GLENN: What's the significance of organisation for you Rich?

RICH: It seems to me that organisation splits off opportunism,

which is all for the good – and is not necessarily the fountainhead of sectarianism. Opportunism, and related factors of racism, ignorance, and cowardice are the driving forces of the North American school work force. At issue is not to just identify those forces, but to fully understand and overcome them. That task demands organisation, which I have urged, should centre in schools in de-industrialised North America. What makes Marxist practice possible is organisational form. That task is before us, in embryo in groups like the Rouge Forum (Lukacs, 2000, p81; Gibson, 2003). Can we teach in classrooms each day with that in mind, despite the incredible Taylorist pressures of curricula regimentation and high-stakes testing? Can we teach in ways that give people a glimpse of a more egalitarian and democratic society, and also teach for revolutionary practice? Yes, I think we can.

GLENN: What makes you think this, Rich?

RICH: Well Glenn, teaching is one of the most, if not the most, free working class jobs left in North America, and I suspect in England as well.

GLENN: Yes, but we do have a National Curriculum in England, though the New Labour government is loosening it up. And we do have a severely oppressive schools inspection regime, with more testing of our kids than anywhere else, plus a highly competitive, marketised system – with new types of schools being added in the last few years. There is a highly regimented system of teacher training. This is not a land where freedom in classrooms can flourish easily. But the managerial representatives of capital for schooling in England (and I don't just mean head teachers and their deputies, and the local education authorities, but primarily the policy-makers in the Department for Education and Skills), can never control entirely teachers' labour. Labour can never ultimately be controlled in any sphere of work. Our capacity to labour (labour-power) resides within us, ourselves as labourers, and under our will – which gives us a certain kind of power, and poses problems for capital and its representatives.

RICH: Of course Glenn, schools in England may be a tougher proposition. Working as teachers in schools, as on any job, we are restricted by the bosses' efforts to replace our thinking critical minds with their profit-seeking minds. But if we see this as settled by power, and determine how to get some (through close ties with parents, kids, other school workers and community people, through organisations and press like the *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, etc), we can still get enough clout to keep our ideals and still teach.

GLENN: A key issue is how to use the freedoms that we still have within the classroom, and try to maximise them for social

transformation.

RICH: Yes, so what might we teach about and what can we do right now, as students, parents and school workers? We can fight to restore the central issues of life to the methods and substance of schooling. The central issues of life, I suggest, are love (sensuality and reproduction), work (labour and production), knowledge (the struggle for what is true) and freedom (not freedom by being apart, but by being more connected to others – in a community of caring people).

GLENN: How can we do that Rich?

RICH: We can do what teachers do fairly well: construct reason, and connect that with what teachers rarely understand: power. Constructing reason, which is a form of power, means in part having close personal ties with people over time – as any good teacher knows that the gateway to changing a mind is affect. Nothing replaces close personal (and critical) ties, which go directly to good knowledge of terrain, as Iraq and Vietnam demonstrate.

GLENN: Perhaps you could elaborate on why teachers' power is so crucial, Rich.

RICH: Well, it's not just power in relation to organising for big events, public events (demos, protests, etc.), though it is also that. But the more power we have, by organising the chess club, by being a coach, by taking on unwanted tasks, the more freedom we have to teach what reason is, critical thinking, that is, dialectical materialism: how to think of things as they change, the view that we can understand and change the world. So, we teach the scientific method of knowledge, in social studies and physics.

GLENN: And there's an ethical dimension here too, a question of *values*, I believe.

RICH: This is crucial: we teach love, both as a fact of sensual pleasure, and a question of species survival, evolution, and we discuss how sensual love is distinct from exploitative sex, how we can tell lovers from Bill and Monica. With our power and freedom, we restore the study of work, labour, production, labour history, Marx – and revolution, to the curriculum, showing how over time people have made gains, wittingly and not so wittingly, and how we have been betrayed as well. Anything but class, as James Loewen says, is the rule of teaching in US schools, and we need to get the power to break the rule – which the work of the Rouge Forum demonstrates is possible.

GLENN: What about the social context in which schools, teachers and students operate?

RICH: Clearly, we must address the immediate issues in schools:

curricula regimentation, high stakes tests, militarism, demands for cutbacks and de-funding via marketisation. We should show the historically factual ties of these issues to the needs of an imperialist society. What is our immediate goal in this? I think our goal should be, simultaneously, the ability to control our workplaces, schools, in conjunction with kids and parents – and revolution. The struggle for control of the processes and products of work is incessant and necessary on any job, and it should be an understanding of ours. Control of the work place is proved by our ability to shut it down. Between today and shutting it down, we should lead boycotts of the tests, protests, drive the recruiters off the campuses – urge people into more and more direct, self-actualising, collective action against the boss – and against capitalism. To not make the connection is to build nothing that will last. This is not a call for action that is manufactured out of the air. These actions have already happened. Our job is to make sense of them, to encourage and organise more of them – to lead.

GLENN: Becoming *educators* in this much wider and deeper sense that you have outlined.

RICH: Yes, I think we should shut down the schools, as many as we can, as often as we can. Does that mean I want to destroy public, or more exactly not so 'public', education as no nation has a truly public system? No. It means I want to overturn the social relations that make unpublic education rotten, and I want to build a lasting social movement that can create a better world. If we should do that, we will have a responsibility to begin, and maintain, freedom schools in the midst of very serious struggle. I will leave the kind of schooling, and many other unanswered questions that might be pending here, to our discussion.

GLENN: Rich, I would venture to say something about the *kind* of schooling we have and might have for a socialist future. If schooling is an aspect of the 'real movement of society' (communism), then what does this entail? I would argue that there are at least three moments within this movement. First, in relation to capitalist schooling, and in what some such as Geraldine Thorpe here in England have called education in the transitional epoch, the key point is *critique*. This would be the critique of capitalist society, its forms of schooling and training, its markets, and so on. This first moment attempts to push to the fore the *negativity* of all that passes for the 'positive' in capitalist society, especially in education and training. For example, mainstream education researchers and theorists here in the UK are all too quick to grasp the latest 'good idea' emanating from Policyland: the learning society, social capital, personalised learning and so on. Though under New Labour there have been so many of these a reluctant scepticism has developed.

But this misses the point. These policies sound appealing in a way. Who could be against lifelong learning, for example? But in capitalist society these 'good ideas' can only ever be perverted and inverted moments (the opposite) of what they purport to represent. Thus, as I have explained in the case of lifelong learning, in capitalist society this is transformed into a kind of 'learning unto death' in the form of labour-power production. So, the moment of critique is essential – and we need to encourage our students to be critical of all aspects of society. But if critique was all we had to offer, that would be insufficient. And for the second moment Rich, I would like to draw on something that you mentioned earlier, and which Peter McLaren (2000) has talked about in relation to Paulo Freire: *love* – which I think, in its broadest sense, must be linked to *human needs*. An education for the future must be about meeting human needs: not just of the students, but also of the communities in which they live, and beyond. Of course, we must be on our guard that these needs are expressed and considered in truly democratic sites and that the students' and teachers' efforts to meet them are not hijacked by capital or the state. But this may be less of a danger if the state has been smashed already and capital is a battered social force, on the wane! Yet I would not want people to get the impression that the education of the future is just about critique and educating to meet, and in fact meeting, human needs. It must not be entirely negative nor self-sacrificial, but should also point to the *realm of freedom* – the freedom that Marx was talking about in his brief sketch of the communist impulse in the *Economic and Philosophical Notebooks of 1844*. The education of the future has also to speak to desires, wants and dreams.

RICH: Critique (through negation), love, and the realm of freedom; that is not only a fine ground for any classroom, but for revolution. In our current epoch, resistance and the revolutionary struggle are keys to freedom, and to understanding. So, as you say, these moments work in relationship to each other, to the whole of capitalism, and they can operate in similar ways in the everyday classroom as well.

GLENN: Now, I'm not saying that there are three 'stages' in the education of the future: for critique, for human needs, and for opening the realm of freedom – that correspond to capitalism and the transitional epoch, socialism and communist society. *They should all be present in some sense*, though the emphasis would change over time, given successful social transformations. They must all be present in order to give students and teachers a glimpse of the *alternative* social universe and modes of thinking, creativity, learning and being that might make us *want* this alternative society, and its radically different forms of teaching and learning. We must be able to call forth these 'real visions' to show people that *another*

education, another world is possible. This is what Paula Allman talks about, and set about doing, and in fact did in her work at the University of Nottingham (see Allman, 2001, chapters 5 and 6). It can be done. Within education, we must amalgamate the three moments. Of course, we face this task in the light of the necessity for *resistance* in two senses. First, we shall have to resist attempts by the state, parents, some students, some of our own colleagues, local education authorities, the inspectorate, etc., etc. to stop us from doing this. And your previous point about organisation is crucial here Rich. Secondly, we shall need to resist the imperatives of capitalist schooling. These include the social production of labour-power (human capital) for capitalist profit-making, transforming schools into sites of profitability (which is gaining ground fast in England, see Rikowski, 2003) and commercialism – where schools are sites for advertising, branding and gaining market shares. But the form of resistance will change in social transformation, and I don't have space (or time) to expand on that point.

RICH: I'll build just a little on your vital thought here: resistance. I think we need to re-establish that resistance is a major key to learning – as critique and negation – and there is really no alternative to resistance as every working person is going to have to fight to live. It makes sense to rebel. It is right to rebel. And through rebellion, solidarity, and egalitarianism, we can learn our way out of capital's trap – toward freedom, creativity, community or as we have said; toward love (Gibson 2003b).

GLENN: The youth in schools will resist anyway, and you can see this here in England where we have the most-tested school kids but also, according to some research reported in the *Times Educational Supplement* as few months ago, the world's worst behaved school kids (see Slater, 2004). I don't think those facts are unconnected. The exclusion rates (for gross bad behaviour) and truancy rates are also high, with the New Labour government have instituted a series of truancy 'initiatives' in the past few years, including cracking down on the parents of truants with fines and in a few cases jail sentences. However, more politically significant forms of resistance have also occurred in the last few years: the school pupil strikes and walk outs against the war in Iraq, and also strikes in support of teachers who have dared to speak out against management policies and poor working conditions in some schools. The key point is how this resistance is *expressed*. Kids who get excluded from schools or truants have not, to date, formed groups that have challenged the constitution of contemporary life in schools. Truants, of course sometimes hang out in groups, and in the London Borough of Newham, where I live, the cops carry out periodic 'truancy sweeps' and round these groups up and ship them back to school. And there are billboards urging 'good citizens' to report on truants to the

police! But truants have not formed any kind of movement of opposition to the constitution of the school in England, as far as I know.

On the other hand, the kids striking against the war in Iraq did have a certain level of organisation – which even the mainstream press acknowledged when they advocated that the ‘ringleaders’ should be heavily stamped on. These strikes against the Iraqi war caused massive panic in mainstream media and political circles. The situation was compounded by the fact that Citizenship was inserted into the National Curriculum in 2002 and some right-wingers made the connections and called for the abolition of this ‘dangerous’ new subject. But from what I’ve read and experienced, tame and domesticating citizenship classes had nothing to do with it! Between the invasion of Afghanistan and the build up to the war in Iraq I taught in schools in east London and Essex. Muslim kids were incensed against what was happening, but many non-Muslims were too. These kids didn’t need citizenship classes to stir ‘em up!

RICH: And there is always something that can be learned from resistance, even mis-guided resistance. I think it is nearly always better to resist, than not, even though that must be tempered by a long-term outlook, good judgement. If we take a broad view, the Iraqi resistance to the US invasion, as mis-led as it may be, demonstrates to the world the strategic weakness of what was considered the most powerful nation in the history of the world, the weakness of the looter who is unable to make close friendly ties with the people. If we move back into school, we see teachers struggling for freedom every day, the freedom to use their good judgement, applied to specific situations and kids, which is surely a foundation of teaching. Last spring, 2004, I watched a young teacher refuse to force a child to take a high-stakes test. She did not have tenure, and she was very afraid. But she knew that the child’s mother had died that week, and to impose the test would clearly be child abuse. The principal finally retracted what had been a direct order. I wrote down here comment to me after her interchange with the principal, “That was the first time I felt like a whole person since I got here.” This teacher realized that she had to have some power (which in this case she gained from passion and the sheer strength of her case), to get the freedom, to use her good judgement. Teachers who do not really grasp the value they create have a hard time decoding their incredible potential power – and so they have less freedom.

GLENN: Yes Rich, in the UK, even mainstream writers and commentators are beginning to question why teachers should ‘just follow orders’ and try to do what New Labour, the Department of Education and Skills and Ofsted (the national inspectors for schools)

tell them. Sue Palmer wrote an article in the *Times Educational Supplement* in September 2004 (Palmer, 2004) that argued that teachers can 'say no' to misguided educational reforms and claim back some of their dignity and professional standing, though the idea of teachers being 'professionals' often brings with it a chasm between teachers and parents, students and other educational workers. More recently, Phil Revell (an ex-teacher himself) has written in *Education Guardian* about how education ministers have decided on the nature of the curriculum and teacher training with hardly any reference to the views of teachers. In the process, they are charged with acting according to government diktats in the classroom, with Revell arguing that they are perhaps more like parrots than professionals. He quotes one primary school head teacher, who thought that new teachers coming out of training are basically better than ever, but have limitations nevertheless: "They are really good practitioners, but in a one-dimensional way. It's all about the [official] schemes of work, the literacy and numeracy hours. The idea that there might be ways to teach these things that lie outside those programmes is heresy to most of these teachers" (cited in Revell, 2005, p.3). So, they are good technicians but only in a very narrow sense insofar as they follow the official views of what teaching is all about. Yet Revell does not seem to like teachers when they band together in trade unions either. He thinks that teachers should constitute a 'real' profession along the lines of doctors and lawyers in the UK.

RICH: But from what I've read of your work Glenn, I've noticed that teachers have a much deeper significance for you. Perhaps you could expand on this a bit.

GLENN: Yes Rich, they do. All this stuff about professionalism kind of misses the point. For me, the key point is that teachers and trainers are involved in producing the unique, living commodity on which the existence and maintenance of the capitalist system rests: labour-power, the capacity to labour. As skills, forms of knowledge but also attitudes (especially work and social attitudes) and personality traits and modes of behaviour exist within workers as labour-power teachers and trainers are highly significant. They develop and nurture these skills and so forth in a definite, institution-bound and intentional manner through forms of the *social production of labour-power* in contemporary capitalism. Labour-power is transformed into labour in the capitalist labour process and value is incorporated in commodities produced by this labour. After a certain point, in the working day, week or whatever, value over-and-above that represented in the *wage* is produced, surplus-value (i.e. unpaid labour). Out of this surplus-value come tax, rent and other deductions plus the value necessary to start the production cycle over once again. Also, profits come out of this

surplus-value too. For employers and representatives of capital (managers), the *quality* of labour-power is important, *ceteris paribus*. Higher quality labour-power will result in the line between necessary labour (value as represented in the wage) and surplus labour (constituted through surplus, unpaid labour) being re-drawn to favour the latter as value constituting the wage is *produced quicker*. So Rich, teachers are 'working for capital' to the extent that they enhance the quality of labour-power whether they realise it or not, or care about it or not. This is one of the tragedies of labour: where teachers' apparent positivity, as they increase 'educational standards', becomes a perverse *negative* aspect of their social existence when contextualised within the social universe of capital. However, in nurturing and developing the one commodity, labour-power, whose expenditure in the labour process keeps the whole system going teachers and trainers attain a certain *social power*. They have crucial inputs into the constitution of labour-power, and there are always possibilities for subverting the process through *educating for values that are antithetical to capitalist production* and all it engenders: social inequalities, social divisions of 'race', gender, sexuality, physical capabilities, war, imperialism and so on. Of course, students can also resist being transformed into labour-power conducive to producing value and surplus-value too.

RICH: Yes Glenn, but as I understand it student resistance does not always make sense. Paul Willis did a fine job showing us that long ago, in *Learning to Labor* (Willis, 1981). Too often, kids resist by deciding that rejecting the struggle for knowledge, critique as you rightly put it, is rubbish, not in their interest.

GLENN: That's true. And we shall always have to keep Paul Willis' tremendous study in view to remind us of this. The notion of student resistance is double-edged. Some forms of it count against socialist transformation. So in Willis' study the Lads' rejection of the value of intellectual work meant that their penetrations (as Willis called them) of school and work realities was always going to be limited by their own local knowledge and rootedness in their communities. Plus their forms of resistance were underpinned by sexist and racist values and outlooks which ran against any claims some might hold that these guys were in the socialist vanguard. Yet in the last couple of years in the UK school students have shown a willingness to engage in acts of resistance, or what the Leeds May Day Group (2004) 'moments of excess' that do seem to have a wider and deeper importance for resistance to capital. I've already noted the protest against entry into the Iraqi war by school students. But they have also been involved in other struggles that generate hope. For example, action to support sackings of respected teachers (e.g. a report in the *Daily Mail* in December last year), strikes against low quality education (see Leprowska, 2004),

and strikes in support of classroom teachers against the policies of unpopular head teachers (see Hawkins, 2004). I've also noticed a rise in the number of reports in the *Times Educational Supplement* international pages of students striking and boycotting exams – for example, the recent school students' boycott of exams in Norway (Buscall, 2005). But these events can be read as disconnected and always liable to be countered by incorporation or repression, perhaps just at the point when the flame of resistance is burning most brightly, Rich. The issue of organisation seems important at this point.

RICH: Yes Glenn and now I would like to come back to the question of organization, and tie that to learning from resistance, as well as to your idea of critique, and the question of meeting human needs. Many of my friends who guided my work for years, like Marty Glaberman and others, people for whom I have the deepest respect—people who lived exemplary lives for freedom, against capitalism—believed that it is solely *within resistance that people learn*, that within resistance, there is inherently revolution. Since, “work sucks,” resistance is necessary, and so, then, is revolution. In some of their work, they set up a practical and philosophical axiom: no idea can occur to anyone before it takes place in social practice. I think there is a parallel element in some of Paulo Freire's work, in that he takes trust of the people as an element of faith—though again, Freire clearly believed in revolutionary organizations, while Marty did not (see also Karl Korsch, and Raya Dunayevskaya).

GLENN: Perhaps you could expand on this some, Rich.

RICH: Right, Glenn. Now, it may be that facts exist before they are apprehended, but it remains that there are those who comprehend their daily reality so well that they can imagine something else; Marx and the transitory nature of class struggle, for example, or Archimedes and calculus. Imagination, key to any classroom, always coupled with wonder, is built on critique, and, perhaps, leaps out of it. Ideas can jump ahead of daily life, even its careful critique – without which there is nothing. I think this is a philosophical and practical demonstration that leads, again, to the question of *organization*. That imaginative leap, jumping up out of analysis, is not going to occur to everyone all at once, not even over time. So, organization makes sense...

GLENN: If I could just interject here, Rich. I think that one of the problems the Leeds May Day Group (2004) were struggling with is that organisation can dampen down the potential for 'moments of excess', moments that exceed aspects of what is taken as the 'reality' of capitalist social life and simultaneously challenge it by posing alternatives. They argue against a form of politics that becomes like work, with its notion of efficiency, directing or

resources and targets and so on (see p.9). Yet they also note that organisation is needed to open up 'other spaces for us to move into' (p.12). The dialectic between moments of excess and creative organisation is difficult to live, to *feel* (though maybe not so much when you're in its matrix, so to speak), but crucial according to the folk in the Leeds May Day Group.

RICH: Organization allows ideas to be distilled, recreated, in part in response to human needs, understanding that *truth does not lie in the minds of a central committee*, but in the interaction of an organization and the people, and their circumstances. Organization makes sense in school, and in revolution. Teachers who want to resist in schools are likely to be in the minority. To survive as critical educators, revolutionaries, they will need friends, meaning they will need to systematically set up networks of people they can connect with, both to be more creative, and to simply share bitterness. On the front of social change, revolution, it is quite clear that in order to overturn (not just meet and hold, but overturn) a ruthless, highly organized, hierarchical, enemy, justice is going to demand organization.

GLENN: Of course, Rich, for teacher-revolutionaries, education activists and Left academics it is often the case that they will be isolated and so might feel and actually be powerless or worse (vilified, at risk job-wise and so on). I've certainly been in that position. When I worked at a place called Epping Forest College in Essex from 1985 – 1994 I was fortunate to have a few socialists to work with, but we were very much in a minority. What we said about the direction of what we call in the UK 'further education' was not popular with mainstream teachers at the College. Yet much of it came to pass and life for teachers in the whole further education sector after April 1993 (when colleges became 'incorporated' and so competing against other colleges) deteriorated: new contracts from hell, rampant managerialism, increase in corruption, the drive for money over education provision and a lowering of relative pay rates and so on. Indeed, the friends I worked with at Epping Forest College have all left working in the further education sector, though we meet up three or four times a year in London. In 1994, in the first year of working in the new further regime (with struggles over the new contracts, staff appraisal and other issues), I decided to join the Hillcole Group of Radical Left Educators, founded by Dave Hill and Mike Cole in 1989. There we had socialist educators and activists working in various sectors (schools, further education and training and in higher education and education research). This helped me get a broader handle on events, tactics and education politics. It was *organisation*, but a form of organisation that, in some ways and to some extent, enabled us to plan for critical educational activities and to share experiences. Kids need some

kind of organisation too. Truancy, acts of resistance to capitalist schooling in small groups can be creative and even educational (some of my friends were truants when at school and claimed they learnt more by not going to school). Michael Howard, the UK Conservative Party leader [now ex-leader], used to bunk off school and play snooker (a game similar to pool), so that argument obviously has its limitations!

RICH: Kids who have learned to dislike learning in school have not been shown how to imagine how to live in another way, and, as I think you indicate, they have not learned that their critique can help them not only understand the mire of much of daily life, but to transform it.

GLENN: Organisation conducive to generating moments of excess, and these on an expanding scale, is vital for teachers and students, and both in combination – and must relate to human needs.

RICH: Yes Glenn, now to continue to connect with your stream, that organization will surely have to address human needs. I stress the human side of that. What the teacher I mentioned previously said is, I think, on the mark. She was *human* in her *resistance*. We cannot be free and whole except in the struggle against the whole of the processes of capital. In this case, I am trying to reposition the idea of the whole human, which is written all over Marx, in a different light. I don't think that freedom, wholeness, has to exist beyond necessity. It seems to me that it can exist in revolution, in the *process* of getting beyond necessity. I felt freer while I sat in jail as the result of an anti-war demonstration than I felt when I was working in the Ford Rouge plant. I know this is a stretch, and that, on the contrary, my friends who have been held in the 18th century Richmond Hill prison in Grenada, the Grenada 17 falsely charged and jailed for the last 20 years, are not more free than me. But I also know that there is a great release of freedom and creativity inside resistance, and that is what I see as being the basis of being free and whole for us today. Even in the little joys of daily classroom life, where teachers routinely teach kids to put on "ole massa," the principal, who, on an official visit, is given a Potemkin Village of a lesson plan by students and the teacher alike, that kind of tricksterism, can be done, and give kids a sense of the fact that the "truth of the Master is in the Slaves."

GLENN: Of course, we need to relate resistance to human needs.

RICH: So, now, to human needs: I think the main human need we can really address, and deliver, is the need to exist within a caring community, where people's creativity is honoured, where humility is linked to forgiveness for learning, making mistakes – and where forms of exploitation are not honoured, as in racism or sexism: close personal ties. We can offer that in a classroom, and in a

revolutionary organization.

GLENN: These things are important; we have to *feel* the transformation, to have an emotional bond with it. Yet crass materialists might point to increases in GDP or more TV channels or yet more shit that mobile phones can do. In socialism we'll have more and better mobile phones!

RICH: I am not at all so sure we can offer people who we urge to make a revolution to overcome capital's relentless demands for surpluses, in labour or value, that they will quickly have more stuff. For many, probably most, it seems to me that we won't have more stuff for quite some time, even basics. We are just getting a glimpse of what capital's personifications are willing to do to protect their privileges, as in Chechnya, Iraq, Afghanistan, and, back a little, to what was probably three million dead in Vietnam and an effort to defoliate the region. Conrad's fearsome "Heart of Darkness," mantra, "Exterminate the brutes," still plays too well today. I do not doubt that ruling classes will bomb their own cities, poison their own water, blow up their own oil wells, i.e., smash everything they can in the belief that the absence of abundance will recreate their class, hoping inequality will rise from scarcity. We must take that away from them.

GLENN: As educators we must argue that we want to create a *new* world, not draw a parallel universe which is jammed with more gadgets than the old one. We pose the possibility of values in a world, today's world that incorporates social drives that deny values but *impose value*.

RICH: Our countermove, which really is an overcoming, an overturning as in the sense of soil being shovelled, turned up, ground up, given new life – is to promise a humane world, and from that, stuff that can someday take us beyond necessity. It follows that an organization of people who want to deal with this issue will need an ethic, which could be negative, as in, "It is wrong to exploit people," or in the positive, "from each according to their commitment to each according to need." That can happen in an organization, and in a classroom too – just as classrooms can be conducted without rewards of pizza parties and stars on the forehead, the only reward being the struggling for what is true, itself. Still, the question concerning what people need to know, and how they need to know it in order to win liberation from tyranny is still largely unanswered.

GLENN: And that is where radical, critical educators have a key role to play, I feel. What knowledge is worthwhile is typically left to bourgeoisie educational philosophers, education ministers or the so-called experts in the press to pontificate on. Struggles over what is socially useful or even valid knowledge are much to the fore now.

I'm aware, through Internet sources that Left professors in the US have to watch what they say in lectures otherwise in some cases members of the fundamentalist Christian groups (often backed by right-wing staff and media interests) mount legal cases against them. I guess this will spread to the UK. Here, of course, we have no written constitution or tenure (abolished by the Thatcher administration) to offer even the flimsiest protection to higher education staff. Furthermore, Francis Beckett, in a recent article in the *New Statesman* indicated how lesbian and gay groups on university campuses in London and Manchester have suffered harassment, and some gay activists have even received death threats from religious groups (see Beckett, 2005). These culture wars are becoming intense, and tense.

RICH: And at some point, we will need to deal with the question of violence. I think we should abhor violence, especially deadly violence, as it is a clear admission of hopelessness, an ending of possibilities. In a way, this is a binary negation that is, at once, unavoidable and unacceptable. We should try to overcome the violence of authoritarianism in the classroom, and in the classroom we can usually do that by meeting violence with care, critique, and community. Outside the classroom, however, reason will not always overcome the 101st Airborne Division, now busy in Iraq, but unleashed on my hometown, Detroit, in 1967. The Masters will never adopt the ethics of the Slaves, so our transformation, if it is to be thoroughgoing, needs to find a way through that. How can we create harmony in the midst of all perceived disharmony in contemporary capitalism? We can learn from history. I think the Chinese Red Army, and the Vietnamese liberation movement tried to figure that out, perhaps unsatisfactorily, but credit the effort. Both were, after all, military operations that, at the same time, grasped the entire political-economic implications of their work. From what I read the Chinese treated prisoners very well, trying to win them over, and frequently sent them back to their units to encourage mass desertions. The Vietnamese conducted mass propaganda with US troops, which had something to do with the levels of desertions, refusals to fight, fraggings, etc. But, I have to admit that at least on the face of it, in both instances the convincing side of the case was made by the Chinese Red Army, and the Vietnamese liberation movement, shooting those who opposed them. This is how serious this is. We are talking about people killing other people – as will surely happen if capital just continues to run wild, and which may come to an end if we can revolutionize it, but frankly I believe we will see World War Three first.

GLENN: I'm not sure it will come to that! If I was a betting guy (and I used to be, on horse racing, when I was younger) I would back revolution and social transformation winning out. Of course,

we need a theory of the forces making for the implosion of capital's social universe. But I'm sure that this theory will not be of the usual kind (forces and relations of production clashing, and all the typical stuff). I also feel that a *politics of human resistance* will emerge: a politics that *resists* forms of education and training that seek to reduce human existence to labour-power, to resist education that functions to contain the future of the human, to resist education that attempt to limit, deny and curtail 'moments of excess' and socially transformative actions. Classrooms, training institutions, schooling processes and the academy will have important roles to play in such a politics. It would be a politics of a truly new kind that would focus on struggles over capital's weakest link: labour-power!

RICH: Even so, we both know classrooms are not revolutionary organizations, and should not be, so where one begins and the other starts might lead to an interesting exchange.

GLENN: Indeed it would! The boundaries between education, production and the political are dissolving rapidly. As Meatloaf said: 'Everything Louder than Everything Else!' (see Rikowski, 2006). Hyper-neoliberalism is eating itself!

References

- Allman, Paula (1999) *Revolutionary Social Transformation: Democratic Hopes, Political Possibilities and Critical Education*, Westport, Connecticut: Bergin & Garvey.
- Allman, Paula (2001) *Critical Education Against Global Capitalism: Karl Marx and Revolutionary Critical Education*, Westport, Connecticut: Bergin & Garvey.
- Beckett, Francis (2005) Even *Desperate Housewives* is a victim of the culture wars, *New Statesman*, 4th March, pp.26-27.
- Benn, Caroline and Chitty, Clyde (1999) There is an alternative, in: M. Allen, C. Benn, C. Chitty, M. Cole, R. Hatcher, N. Hirtt and G. Rikowski, *Business, Business, Business: New Labour's Education Policy*, London: Tufnell Press.
- Buscall, Jon (2005) Classroom war over tests, *Times Educational Supplement*, 25th February, p.20.
- Daily Mail (2004) School blocks mass rally for sacked teacher, *Daily Mail*, 10th December, p.43.
- Dunayevskaya, Raya (2002) *The Power of Negativity*, Lanham Md: Lexington Books.
- Freire, Paulo (1998) *Pedagogy of Freedom*, New York: Rowman and Littlefield.

- Gibson, Rich (2003a) What do people need to know, and how do they need to come to know it, in order to be free? Online at:
<http://www.pipeline.com/%7Ergibson/free.htm>
- Gibson, Rich (2003b) Can communities of resistance and transformation be born in the social process of school? *Teacher Education Quarterly*, at:
<http://www.rohan.sdsu.edu/%7Ergibson/CCTERG.htm>
- Glaberman, Marty (2003) *Punching Out*, Detroit: Bewick Press.
- Hawkins, Jennifer (2004) Student strike piles on pressure on beleaguered head, *Times Educational Supplement*, 8th October, p.7.
- Korsch, Karl (1952) *Marxism and Philosophy*, on line at www.rougeforum.org
- Leeds May Day Group (2004) *Moments of Excess*, Leeds May Day Group: Leeds. Available from Imdg@ntlworld.com
- Leprowska, Dorothy (2004) Pupils walk out after letter from teacher, *Times Educational Supplement*, 21st May, p.11.
- Lukacs, Georg (2000) *Tailism and the dialectic, in defense of history and class consciousness*, New York: Verso.
- Marx, Karl (1845) Theses on Feuerbach, Addendum in K. Marx & F. Engels, *The German Ideology*, Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- Marx, Karl (1869) On General Education, Speech to the General Council meeting of the International Workingmen's Association, 17th August, in: *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, Volume 21, p.398, London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- McLaren, Peter (2000) *Che Guevara, Paulo Freire, and the Pedagogy of Revolution*, Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Palmer, Sue (2004) You can always say no, *Times Educational Supplement*, 24th September, p.27.
- Revell, Phil (2005) Professionals, or parrots? *Education Guardian*, 8th March, pp.2-3.
- Rikowski, Glenn (2003) The business takeover of schools, *Mediactive: Ideas Knowledge Culture*, Issue 1, pp.91-110.
- Rikowski, G. (2006) *Everything Louder than Everything Else!* Posted to the Volumizer, Glenn Rikowski's blog, on 7th February, and available online at:
<http://journals.aol.co.uk/rikowskigr/Volumizer/entries/2006/02/07/everything-louder-than-everything-else/928>
- Shepherd, Richard (1993) *Once Bitten, Twice Shy*, 10th March, unpublished manuscript, Norwich, England.
- Slater, Jon (2004) 'Worst pupils in the world', *Times Educational Supplement*, 16th January, p.17.

Willis, Paul (1981), *Learning to Labor*, Columbia University Press: New York.

Rich Gibson is an Associate Professor of Education at San Diego State University, California. He is co-founder of The Rouge Forum, a group of educators, students and parents seeking a democratic society. The Rouge Forum Web Page is available at: http://www.pipeline.com/~rgibson/rouge_forum/ Rich's latest book is *Neoliberalism and Educational Reform* (2006, Hampton Press), edited with E. Wayne Ross. Rich Gibson's *Education Page for a Democratic Education* can be viewed at: <http://www.pipeline.com/~rgibson>

Contact: rgibson@pipeline.com

Glenn Rikowski is a Senior Lecturer in Education Studies in the School of Education at the University of Northampton. His publications include: *The Battle in Seattle: Its Significance for Education* (2001, Tufnell Press) and *Marxism Against Postmodernism in Educational Theory* (2002, Lexington Books) – an edited collection co-authored with Dave Hill, Peter McLaren and Mike Cole. Glenn's blog, the *Volumizer* is at: <http://journals.aol.co.uk/rikowskigr/Volumizer>

Contact: Rikowskigr@aol.com

Acknowledgement: An edited and shorter version of this e-dialogue appeared previously in *A World To Win: A rough guide to a future without global capitalism*, (2004, Lupus Books) entitled 'Education and the Future: a transatlantic dialogue'.