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ACCESS

INTRODUCTION

'Here and there': An introduction

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This July the Nicaraguan Revolution will be nine years old. It will have endured almost eight years of U.S. foreign policy under a Reagan Administration committed to 'rolling back communism'. There have been three main prongs to the U.S. Administration's attack on Nicaragua: the now highly-visible contra war, a comprehensive economic blockade, and a concerted propaganda war. The military and economic strategies have achieved considerable success in undermining and, in some cases, virtually bringing to a halt ambitious social, economic, and welfare policies which had made remarkable ground during the first two years of the Revolution. From this distance it would appear that the propaganda war has been much less successful almost to the point of total failure. In part this reflects a pervasive scepticism toward U.S. propaganda wars. (This scepticism is, of course fuelled by such misadventures as Contragate, and the recent fiasco in Geneva where the U.S. sought to have Cuba censured and isolated via the Human Rights Commission. The U.S. was forced to withdraw its petition in the face of overwhelming defeat.) Equally important, however, is the fact that the Nicaraguan Revolution quickly won a considerable reputation for openness and dialogue, democratic commitment and a willingness to learn from and make amends for mistakes of policy and practice (as, for example, on the Atlantic Coast). This reputation and the reality that lies behind it has made Nicaragua one of the best researched and understood revolutions of recent times.

The importance of this latter point extends beyond its role as fire power within a propaganda war. In addition, Nicaraguan initiatives in the economic and social policy fields provide a striking counterpoint to contemporary experiences within those Western nations gripped by 'the New Right': where the state increasingly abdicates responsibility for providing social services, and makes a pretence of pursuing equality (now called equity) through policies of greater devolution regardless of whether those to whom power and choice devolve are in a position to exercise them in their (best) interests.

In Education and Power and subsequent works[1] Michael Apple provides a framework for analysing the broad approach to recent educational 'reforms' undertaken in such countries as Britain, the U.S. Australia and New Zealand. He insists that these reforms be understood in relation to the dual crises of legitimation and capital accumulation presently bedevilling the state. Apple argues that in response to the current economic crisis schools are seen as having to become more efficient, 'to enable them to meet the ideological and 'manpower' requirements of the economy'.[2] This calls for the state to instigate major shifts in school and curricular control. More generally, addressing the immediate economic agenda requires strengthening the ideology of possessive individualism. 'In order for capital accumulation to go on, the consumer must be stimulated to purchase more goods individually',[3] since this expands markets and, hence, generates profits, employment, and other necessities for maintaining economic growth.

This general approach to boosting capital accumulation creates, however a contradiction which threatens the state's legitimacy in one of its major spheres: namely, education. For a strengthened ideology of possessive individualism demands expression in all areas of consumption. Witness, for example, the way in which such items as telephones and car number plates have been opened up to consumer choice in New Zealand recently. 'Individual groups', says Apple, 'will...focus

on the consumption of all goods and services, including education', seeking opportunity to exercise their own choice of product. But so far as schools cannot meet the stimulated (consumer choice) needs of competing individuals under existing financial and ideological conditions, schools lose their legitimacy.[4] Now since schooling comprises a key part of the state's life - education having been described as ' the number one dominant ideological state apparatus' of our epoch[5] - the state's own legitimacy is threatened by this threat to the legitimacy of schools. If possible, the state must try to export this crisis outside of itself. If there is to be a crisis in schooling. far better for the state that this be someone else's crisis rather than its own. For the state to try and intervene directly and overtly in education - or for that matter, in the economy, hence de-regulation and free marketeering - would be to invite blame for the general structural crisis that is upon us.[6] The state's response to the crisis of legitimation here is to reduce its overt control of education and turn schooling over to a market. Responsibility for the administration/management of education and (within wider or narrower bounds) for shaping curriculum offerings is devolved to individuals and groups in the community - via a raft of measures ranging from divesting education management to local boards of trustees through to such highly individualised measures as voucher plans and tax credit systems. At the same time as the state addresses its crisis of legitimacy by such a move it also hands over responsibility for addressing the problem of school efficiency relative to the economic needs of capital accumulation.[7]

On the very day I write these words, the Picot Task Force on the Reform of Educational Administration in New Zealand has released its report. The essential features of its proposed system include:

1. semi-autonomous schools, each run by its own Board of Trustees;
2. a charter of objectives for each school, prepared by the Board of Trustees within national guidelines;
3. bulk granting funds to schools with discretion for the funds' use to be with the school itself;
4. regular auditing (at least every two years) of school performance against its charter of objectives;
5. a national Parent Advocacy Council to act as mediator between schools and parents where disagreements on policy arise;
6. district-based Community Education Forums to facilitate community input into the system;
7. a smaller Ministry of Education to replace the current Department of Education.[8]

Every one of these proposals fits perfectly the logic of a state exporting a crisis outside of itself and deflecting attention away from the inherently unstable character of a capitalist economy which regularly requires major restructuring at the expense of massive human anxiety and pain.

Consider, for example, the proposal that schools be subject to an external audit every second year. An independent Review and Audit Authority with responsibility to the Minister of Education would assess the school's performance against its charter. Their report would be made public. In the event of a school failing to perform it would be given a brief period in which to improve. A further audit would then be conducted. If that audit was also failed the school's trustees would be dismissed, an interim manager appointed, and a new election held.[9]

In this way state responsibility for educational failings has been utterly dissolved away. So too has its responsibility for pursuing/ensuring success. The state can devolve to individual citizens responsibility for what the state itself has been unable to achieve - all the while keeping before the population (abetted by dominant ideology and widespread public anxiety) a broad educational agenda of schools somehow playing an effective role in the process of resolving a deep-seated economic crisis. To the extent that schools can't make jobs'[10] this is an impossible agenda for schools as a whole to meet.

Given the U.S. experience, it is a reasonable bet that 'successful schools' will effectively become those whose trustees are able to frame charters on all fours with capitalist restructuring, and who can appoint/induce teachers and procure other resources equal to their charter goals. This, of course, will be to 'turn schools into company stores'.[11] Education is made more functional relative to the needs of capital and the interests of those who prevail under capitalism. And in the same process, the very ethos of capital and business is ground even more deeply into popular culture and consciousness by restructuring school administration in accordance with the logic of capital and business.

With regard to the North American scene, Aronowitz and Giroux note how public perception of the nature and role of education has taken a sharp turn in the direction of a narrow careerism. The demand is for education to be relevant. However,

> at a time when nearly everyone is anxious about his/her place in a rapidly shifting job market, relevance has come to mean little else than job preparation. While many jobs require applicants to know how to read and write and to possess skills for specialised employment, few employers require mastery or even familiarity with literary canon, the arts, and music, much less a secure command of history and the social sciences. Conservatives demand "excellence", by which they usually mean that schools should offer more rigorous science and math curriculum - a notion in keeping with the ... idea that the mastery of techniques is equivalent to progress. Their language of "achievement", "excellence", "disciplines", and goal orientation really means vocational education or, in the most traditional mode, a return to the authoritarian classroom armed with the three Rs curriculum.[12]

Of course, for some children, economic security and job placement will be guaranteed independently of whether or not the schools they attend buckle down to an efficiently-pursued economy-led educational agenda. This aside, in a time of economic strain and uncertainty there is every reason to expect narrow 'visions' of efficiency, excellence, accountability and vocation o according with the ethos of business as usual, to prevail. In such a setting, those districts abounding with potential trustees steeped in the prevailing ethos and competent in its terms will be well served. (Naturally, these very districts will be beet placed to supplement centralised funding to secure extra resources attuned to meeting technocratic charter goals). In 'other districts schools may look forward, predictably, to regular audits, re-elections, and to absorbing blame for the failure of their clients to find paid work. Or, alternatively, they might develop alternative - even radically alternative - educational charters which they can and do meet, and consciously choose to accept responsibility for turning, out pupils whose economic, marginality reflects on an education poorly attuned to making them employable (but which may be highly efficient in keeping alive a minority ethnic language/culture, in promoting working class consciousness, or attaining some other such end).

Either way, currently marginalised groups - economically, culturally, ethnically, - are very likely to be trapped in a vicious circle. With the larger social agenda and ground rules remaining unchanged, the disadvantaged are effectively given enhanced opportunity, encouragement, and responsibility to participate still more actively in the very values and practices wherein they are currently disadvantaged. The cruellest blow of all is that for subordinate social groups g the (unequal) chance to 'win' - to set a charter and attain its goals - is really a chance to lose: whatever course they decide (or, given prevailing ideologies and perceptions, 'decide') to take. To opt out of a narrow vocation/economy-led vision will almost certainly result in reproducing the immediate economic disadvantage of its clientele. On the other hand, to accept the dominant agenda and to more or less succeed in its terms is, nevertheless, to lose on the criteria that really matter. It is to lose the possibility of forging some collective group or class vision for a just society by opting into a logic of extreme fragmentation. Schools, teachers, districts, regions, and even like-minded groups spread across a city, become atomised - cut off from collective involvement by the intensified organisation of educational life around ideologies and practices of personal destiny, private choice and possessive individualism. What else are semi-autonomous schools, each with its own Board of

Trustees and charter of goals, if not atoms; or fragments? It is, in addition, to lose important possibilities for focused collective action against the very structures and practices that simultaneously create patterned disadvantage and recurring crises in capital accumulation. Above all, it is to lose the possibility of pursuing and winning, intact, the number one dominant state ideological apparatus. For whatever else a maximum state education system is. once it is won and controlled by a mass movement it offers the sunset guarantee against an easy return to social injustice in the interests of minority elites.

Add to all of this the obvious fact that divesting responsibility for educational control and efficiency readily legitimates minimising expenditure out of revenue on education. It sets up the possibility for gradually (or not so gradually) reducing the education vote in real terms - a point keenly appreciated by many where it applies to public health but, perhaps, not so well appreciated in respect of education. Ruses for cutting educational expenditure (together with social and welfare programme spending generally) are necessary at a time when tax 'reforms' are redistributing wealth to the rich, and when corporate tax dollars are resented by capitalists as a loathsome impediment to accumulation.

The report of the Picot Task Force may be seen as simply the most recent confirming instance of the account advanced by Apple[13] of contemporary educational 'reform' within societies like our own. I have little doubt that the New Zealand Government will adopt the substance of Picot's package.[14] At that time New Zealand will officially subscribe to a model of educational restructuring in perfect tune with supply side economics and its 'New Right' ideological garb. The state will have been allowed to withdraw from its direct and overt role in shaping and controlling education - with al! the possibilities this entails for progressively reducing educational funding out of revenue. It will have successfully transferred responsibility for administering education on equal formal terms to communities which are patently unequal in their actual opportunity to exercise it in their (best) interests. In so doing government will open up to market forces direct, unmediated ideological control of education. Under these conditions a 'lowest common denominator' effect will operate, submerging most schools in an ethos of tailoring their offerings to narrow criteria of employability: at precisely the time when more expansive and critical forms of learning are needed if disadvantaged groups are to understand and address the real sources of their disadvantage. By this means, the people themselves are drawn more actively (and accountably!) into the process of reproducing their own disadvantage, while the state effectively - but almost invisibly - abdicates its professed responsibility for promoting as far as possible the interests of all. Having abdicated this responsibility the state can no longer be held accountable for failing to discharge it successfully. An inherently unjust economic-social order is thereby enabled to ride out one more crisis, by a process of officially incorporating ever more deeply into the very structure of that order representatives of the people most disadvantaged by it.[15]

Perhaps what strikes me most forcefully about major educational developments within the Nicaraguan Revolution is the way in which they reveal precisely the opposite logic to that which I have just described. If we look at the National Literacy Crusade of 1980 and the initiatives for adult education arising out of it, we find the state assuming direct responsibility for encouraging disadvantaged groups to analyse and understand the origins of their disadvantage, and then and only then fomenting educational structures within which power and responsibility were devolved to the people. It was only after introducing hitherto illiterate and (otherwise) undereducated folk to the rudiments of critical social inquiry, along broadly Freirean lines (for want of a better precis), that the practice of implicating these folk in their own ongoing education could emerge as a meaningful option.

Of course, between the Nicaraguan context and our own there is the world of difference. If we look closely at the wider agenda in our society we can easily see that it is committed to perpetuating and bolstering the advantage of wealth and power elites. We are presently witnessing the restructuring of a capitalist economy and of a wider social formation constrained by capitalism. The

object of the present restructuring exercise (within the economy and the various social, educational, welfare, etc institutions) is to keep the logic of dominant and subordinate, advantaged and disadvantaged, intact at a time when this logic is highly vulnerable to being revealed and challenged. In Nicaragua after 1979 the situation was just the opposite. The Sandinista National Liberation Front had won the right to lead within the liberation war against Somoza, and maintained its political pre-eminence within the Government of National Reconstruction established upon Somoza's defeat. The Historic Programme of the FSLN.[16] initially published in 1969, was a I blueprint for social, political, and economic change committed to overturning established relations and practices of hierarchy and advantage; committed to bringing about structural transformation wherein the interests of those groups traditionally subordinated would assume immediate priority.

Social transformation in accordance with the interests of those hitherto marginalised cannot be donated to a people.[17] It has to be won, build, achieved. It must be created with their active participation and constantly answerable to their needs. The process of transformation must evolve and grow with the people's own evolution in consciousness and capacity for social action. Nicaragua's National Literacy Crusade, anticipated 11 years earlier in the FSLN Programme, reflects state commitment to enabling ordinary people to participate more actively in the life of the nation in accordance with their interests. There is one way, and only one way, in which to understand the Literacy Crusade and subsequent development of Popular Basic Education (for adults) in Nicaragua. This is as mass exercises contrived to initiate participants into a conception of social reality as structured; and, hitherto, as structured in accordance with the interests of minority elites. They extend an invitation to ask - the questions: 'how has our history been made in the past?'; 'in accordance with whose interests has it been made?'; how might history be made from here on with our interests in view?' These are the very questions that people within subordinate groups in our society have been systematically taught NOT to ask during the past one hundred and twenty years. And yet the capacity to ask them, and to answer them accurately, is the sine qua non of genuinely democratic participation. Consequently, ensuring that subordinated peoples can ask and answer them accurately, is the sine guo non of any state opening up participation in good faith. This, in my view, is the crucial ingredient missing in societies like our own.

The Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade has been very well documented.[18] And so only the briefest sketch will be provided in this volume. For readers interested in a comprehensive account I recommend Sheryl Hirshon's And Also Teach Them To Read and Valerie Miller's Between Struggle and Hope. Unfortunately, accounts in English of developments within adult education following the Literacy Crusade are few and far between. And yet it is in just these developments that some of the most important possibilities for community responsibility in education are revealed. From Literacy Student to Popular Teacher, by Rosa Maria Torres, is an in-depth account of popular adult education as it unfolded in Nicaragua between 1979 and 1984. It is a rich portrayal written by someone living and working in the very midst of the educational revolution in Nicaragua.

I prefer to leave her account to speak for itself, rather than presume to speak about it or on its behalf here. There is, however, one final observation that occurs to me in juxtaposing the scene she describes against the one we are currently living through. The U.S., Britain, Australia and New Zealand are among the wealthiest nations in the world. Nicaragua is among the very poorest. Our political leaders have 'discovered' that we cannot afford to maintain an education system which has allegedly become inefficient. Part of the official solution is to devolve responsibility for administering education to the community. At the completion of the Literacy Crusade the Nicaraguan government was faced with a demand and a need to provide an education system for adults which it knew (and knew only too well) it could not afford to provide on any conventional model. At the heart of the official solution reached in Nicaragua was the decision to devolve a good deal of responsibility to the community.

There the similarities between the two cases end.

Notes

1. Michael Apple, Education and Power, London, R.P.K., 1982; Teachers and Texts: a Political Economy of Class and Gender Relations in Education, New York, R.P.K., 1986; 0 The politics of Common Sense: Schooling, Populism and New Right'. ms. University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1988.
2. Education and Power, p. 119.
3. Ibid., p. 122.
4. Ibid.
5. Louis Althusser, Lenin and Philosophy, London g New Left Books, 1971, p. 153. See also, Kevin Harris, Education and Knowledge. London, R.K.P., chapter 5.
6. Compare Michael Apple (1982), QR. cit., 121.
7. It is very important to note that in the U.S. and New Zealand (at least) policy trends are toward devolving more and more responsibility to local groups whilst retaining effective control in the state. The crucial point, however, is that in this process state control is rendered increasingly covert. In the proposals of the Picot Taskforce (see note 8 and text below), responsibility for school administration would be handed over to the Board of Trustees of individual schools whilst the state would retain the power to set national guidelines within which individual school charters would have to be framed. Such a move would enable the state to continue tailoring education to the economic and ideological requirements of elites through manipulating national guidelines. Any failure on the part of schools to 'deliver the goods' would be associated most visibly with the (local/non-governmental) Board of Trustees. Alternatively. the way is left open for the state to set broad national guidelines and leave the tailoring to 'overdetermination' by the ideological persuasions of popular common sense (see Stanley Aronowitz and Henry Giroux below, and Apple. 1988). Either way, the state is positioned by such policy moves to avoid blame for educational failings while maintaining optimal possibilities of education being brought into line with elite interests. With regard to the dynamics of educational control in the U.S., Apple notes that policy moves have intensified control of teaching and curriculum at the state level while opening education up increasingly to the logic of free market choice and private consumer responsibility (1988. p. 7).
8. Compare, Administering for Excellence: effective administration in Education. Report of the Taskforce to Review Educational Administration (Brian Picot. Chairperson). April 1988, pp. xi-xii and 41-63.
9. Ibid., p. 46 and 60-62.
10. The phrase is also the tile of a book by Roy Nash. pertaining to New Zealand education. See Roy Nash. Schools Can't Make Jobs. Palmerston North, Dunmore Press. 1982.
11. Compare. Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren, 'Teacher Education and the Politics of Engagement: the case for democratic schooling'. Harvard Educational Review. 56, 3. 1986. esp. pp. 217-222.
12. Stanley Aronowitz and Henry Giroux. Education Under Siege: the Conservative. Liberal and Radical Debate Over Schooling. London. R.K.P. 1986, pp. 1-2.
13. Especially as advanced in Education and Power. While his later work remains perfectly consistent with Education and Power. Apple's emphases have shifted a little. In his most recent work he seeks to describe and explain how a new hegemonic accord constructed around the philosophic and economic tenets of 'the New Right' has been made into popular 'common sense'. The sorts of proposals advanced by Picot are. of course. precisely what the new 'common sense' would affirm.
14. The Report of the Gibbs Committee on restructuring health provision in New Zealand was released just a few weeks before the Picot Report. It was quickly scotched by the Prime Minister (who is also Minister of Education) and disappeared almost without trace having received absolutely minimal media coverage. By contrast, the Picot Report was released amid a deluge of media attention ranging from a T.V. presentation and 'explanation' of its content specially adapted for teachers and other educational professionals, to the Minister of Education appearing on a Saturday morning radio talkback show. answering questions from the public nationwide. T.V. news reports made the release of the Picot Report their main item, and 'Picot' emerged as the local news story of the year to date (we are still awaiting the America's Cup challenge). Incidentally, 'Picot' considerably eclipsed also the

earlier release The findings of the much more liberal Royal Commission on Social Policy. The Picot recommendations have now been formally adopted by government.

15. The logic operating here parallels almost exactly that which I ascribe to functional literacy programmes for adults of the type developed by the Texas APL team whereby illiterate adults are further immersed in the ethos of capitalism and consumerism within the very process of being taught to read and write. In other words. in the process of learning literacy skills - which is supposed to benefit them by making them functional illiterate adults are incorporated still more deeply into the very ideologies, relations. and practices wherein they are objectively disadvantaged. See my 'Humanising Functional Literacy: beyond utilitarian necessity'. Educational Theory. 36, 4. 1986. esp. pp. 380-381.
16. Reprinted in Sandinistas Speak. New York. Pathfinder Press, 1982.
17. Compare. Colin Lankshear with Moira Lawler, Literacy, Schooling and Revolution. London. Falmer Press. 1987. p. 184. See also. Paulo Freire. Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Harmondsworth. Penguin. 1972.
18. See for example. Fernando Cardenal and Valerie Miller, Nicaragua 1980: the battle of the ABC's. Harvard Educational Review. 51. 1. 1981; Jan Flora. John McFadden and Ruth Warner. 'The Growth of Class Struggle: the impact of the Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade on the political consciousness of young literacy workers'. Latin American Perspectives. to Read. Westport Conn., Lawrence Hill and Co, 1983; Colin Lankshear with Moira Lawler. op. cit. chapter 5; Valerie Miller. Between Struggle and Hope: the Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade. Boulder. Westview Press. 1985: Rosa Maris Torres. Nicaragua: revolution popular, education popular. Mexico D. F., Editorial Linea, 1985.