

## Capitalism's global imperium and the continuing need for radical democratic agency

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### ABSTRACT

The work before you has been written in the wake of a five year study that was published in the spring of 1994 (Brosio: 1994). In the autumn of that year I gave an address at a regional philosophy of education society in the U.S. which is entitled 'Globalism, Postmodernism, the Politics of Identity and the Need for Broad Democratic Political/Educational Coalitions.' This second work represents an attempt to relate more specifically the radical democratic theses of *A Radical Democratic Critique of Capitalist Education* to the terrain called the politics of identity. It is my intent here to pursue the analytic trajectory that has occupied me since the late 1980s - and in many ways for most of my scholarly life.

### Laying the ground work

The work before you has been written in the wake of a five year study that was published in the spring of 1994 (Brosio: 1994). In the autumn of that year I gave an address at a regional philosophy of education society in the U.S. which is entitled 'Globalism, Postmodernism, the Politics of Identity and the Need for Broad Democratic Political/Educational Coalitions.'<sup>1</sup> This second work represents an attempt to relate more specifically the radical democratic theses of *A Radical Democratic Critique of Capitalist Education* to the terrain called the politics of identity. It is my intent here to pursue the analytic trajectory that has occupied me since the late 1980s - and in many ways for most of my scholarly life. This current attempt to argue for the continuing need of radical democratic theory and agency is a dress rehearsal that may not yet be ready for a general audience. The current strengths of capitalism, the class State and the Right have helped cause those of us who are convinced that any bona fide democratic movement must be anticapitalist to be extra cautious in our analyses. The one you are about to read could be called a *repetition generate*, i.e., open to a select public. Hopefully my work will be treated as part of a necessarily tentative attempt to make sense of: (1) the sea changes occurring globally as capitalism's imperium becomes more directly powerful, as well as (2) some of the possibilities for effective theory and informed democratic anticapitalist agency. I invite dialogue from those who read this analysis that is very much still 'under construction'. I choose to think of education in the broadest civic sense rather than confined to what happens within the intramural school - as important as that site is for learning - and hopefully political awareness. Capitalism's present triumphalism is, in part, a consequence of civic educational shortcomings. The recent attempt by capitalists and their agents to include every person within the logic of the market has been caused by many factors; moreover, integral to this current successful attempt to strengthen the regime of capital's hegemony and direct power is the failure of liberalism

and social democracy to put a human face on the world's dominant socioeconomic system. A striking result of the failure to humanize capitalism is the current mood of resignation and cynicism; concomitantly, efforts to survive this latest round of capitalism's offensive have assumed practices called the politics of identity. The success enjoyed by antidemocrats with regard to preventing the construction of a politics capable of intervention into the political economy aimed at securing citizen's rights, economic justice, racial/ethnic and gender equity has convinced some victims of the market's pulverizing logic to turn to identity politics rather than to a politics that features the citizen-worker as the key human category. This is not to argue that the political economy is determinative in iron clad fashion; however, identity politics is being played out on terrains that are most importantly constructed by contemporary capitalist power. The antidemocratic drive toward capitalist totalism has frightened many people as they experience an erosion of erstwhile familiar institutions, practices, habits and sign-posts; understandably, many of them have turned to religious, national, ethnic, racial, gender and sexual preference identities in their attempt to survive the latest instance of what Joseph Schumpeter referred to as the "gale of creative destruction". As I have written elsewhere, "translated into human terms, we are talking about massive human dislocation and suffering. Schumpeter could afford to view the Great Depression as part of the . . . stately progression of capitalist development. Most people required [and require currently] intervention into the economy by the . . . State in order to rescue the victims of the destruction, which was [is] hardly creative for them"(1994: 184).

It is plausible to argue that the alleged failure of grand narratives and other attempts to see things holistically - complemented by a politics that depends on such vantage points - have also contributed to a recurring politics of identity. The widespread diffidence that is characteristic of the postmodernist mood vis-a-vis possibilities for building structural, holistic theories that enable progressive praxes has helped to reduce many persons to minimal selves who are fixated on survival instead of striving to view the social world as one that has been constructed in the interests of the rich and powerful. This inability to construct Jamesonian maps that allow class consciousness to emerge makes the continued practice of single-issue politics likely. In order to get beyond single-issue and/or identity politics there is a need for a collectively developed understanding of how the new world order is being constructed and a realization that broad-based coalitions can resist and perhaps eventually overcome the multinational capitalist attempt to reorder how we live our daily lives. The necessary democratic politics is dependent upon effective educational portrayals of local and global socioeconomic realities. So, we must still interpret our world if we hope to change it. The collective interpretation and political praxis aimed at projecting the democratic imperative into all of the places where we live, work and play must be broadly inclusive; however, I will argue that this movement has a better chance to succeed if its members come together primarily as citizen-workers<sup>2</sup> in order to accentuate what we have in common.

The privileging of citizen-workers as identities or memberships is based upon my conviction that the political economy remains the most important site for popular democratic action. This applies as well to struggles seeking racial/ethnic, gender and sexual preference justice. It has been said that Ralph Miliband was supportive of the 'new social movements' such as feminism, antiracism, peace, ecology and sexual liberation; moreover, "he takes to task those of his fellow socialists who regard these movements as distractions from the 'real' struggle. Miliband recognized that ... [these movements] sprang from real sources within capitalist society . . . One had to appreciate the actual complexity of society and the scale of ... penetration and diffusion of capitalist relations which had brought forward these new foci of resistance . . . The point . . . is not to downplay the new social movements but to convince them that the fulfillment of their own emancipatory needs lies in the overcoming of capitalism and not reforms within capitalism" (Kovel, 1994: 56). Manning Marable (1993: 22) has written that "there is a direct, inescapable connection between working-class organizing, antiracist activism, and the empowerment of people of colour. The vast majority of African-Americans, Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, and other people of colour are, after all, working-class women and men . . . Marx himself always recognized the importance of the race question to the

politics of socialist transformation: 'Labour cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded'. In agreement with Marable, I maintain that we cannot argue for class struggle in the abstract. The idea of socialism becomes meaningful to oppressed people throughout our own societies and elsewhere "when it explains how capitalism perpetuates our unequal conditions and when it gives us some tools to empower ourselves against an ... unjust system. That' s not a metaphysical enterprise but a practical, concrete analysis of actual daily conditions . . . And the day-to-day reality lived by millions of African-Americans, Latinos, and others along the ... race/class fault line beneath American democracy is the continuing upheaval of social inequality and racial prejudice" (Ibid: 23).

The Left must speak to the connectedness among class, racial/ethnic, gender and other categories of subaltern statures instead of dealing with non-class oppression as an afterthought. This is not to say that labour movements should abandon their central places within struggles for radical change in societies that are characterized by advanced capitalist economies and (at least) de jure representative democracies. Members of new social movements and the politics of identity may deny or not realize the crucial importance of a newly organized labour's role; however, Rightists understand well that their main opponents remains organized labour and those whose democratic politics are based on the recognition of the need to contest and ultimately deconstruct capitalist power. This is not the place for a critique of how organized labour in all too many 'advanced' countries has cohabited with the regime of capital as well as having excluding unskilled workers, people of colour and others. However, any transformative politics needs to include at its centre powerful organizations of workers - as persons with political rights. This concept goes beyond paid labour and is certainly more inclusive than the industrial workers who Marx called the proletariat. Joel Kovel (1994: 57) has written provocatively but accurately that, "if you are serious about social transformation, seek out what the ruling class will not tolerate, then organize around it. The bourgeoisie has little trouble in accepting bourgeois feminism, civil rights, environmentalism, or gay liberation - that is, any of the new social movements so long as they do not threaten accumulation. It is, therefore, a *socialist* women's liberation, *socialist* black liberation, *socialist* gay liberation, and *socialist* green movement ... in alliance with a socialist workers' movement, that has to face the heat and carry the day. It will be a coalition, but one 'with a core, a solid centre; and this would have to be ... a socialist party able to exercise a major influence on the coalitions, without any presumption of a privileged position' ..."<sup>3</sup>

Drawing from Christopher Phelps' argument that Marx still matters, I am convinced that the Left(s) must still aspire to create a common politics, albeit on a democratic basis. Solidarity is the *sine qua non* to a successful radical democratic movement/politics. In Phelps' own words:

Sectarian party-building at the expense of autonomous movement development is a . . . mistake, for without broad independent movement activity, socialism will never regain momentum. Any attempt to compress other oppressions into the category of class fails to grasp that capitalism is the rule of a social layer that employs multiple forms of domination . . . But where postmodernism goes awry is in supposing that radicals can do without common politics - a universalizing project, as postmodernists disdainfully call it. Since social reality is neither exclusively nor primarily linguistic or textual, changing it requires more than cleverly adding slash marks between words or putting parenthesis around syllables. Rather than ... pose at ironic remove, a responsible radical social theory should be immersed in the social world and in political practice. Only at their peril, therefore, can radicals relinquish the hard-won conceptual centerpiece of class. Class struggle will remain central as long as society remains capitalist (Phelps 1995: 97).<sup>4</sup>

Phelps reminds us that analysis should not be confused with empathy vis-a-vis those we judge to suffer the most. Human suffering must be addressed and alleviated; however, ranking high on a suffering index does not mean that one or one's group is progressive. Marx privileged the organized working class as the agent of radical transformation because of its position within the political economy of that time. All too many current social movements are weak in part because beneath their seeming radicalness they are, in fact, liberal interest-groups. Bona fide radicals must help

convince members of new social movements and politics of identity that they can, and should, go beyond a 'radicalism' that is limited to a "celebration of unrefined, immediate identity and expressed in the metaphor of 'deconstruction'. Marxism affirms the capacity of ordinary people to reason and draw upon a ... heritage of social thought to illuminate ... issues . . . It helps to explain how capitalism engenders cynicism, mockery and irony and why those poses are therefore far from radical. Unlike deconstruction[ism], socialism is oriented fundamentally toward a politics of hope, toward a construction of a better world: an imagined future of human cooperation, equality and justice whose seeds are already planted in the soil of the present" (Ibid: 97-8).

My privileging of citizen-worker as the category or identity around which to organize effective radical collective agency - because of the political economy's continued preeminence as the site for struggle - does not rest on a crystal clear demarcation between public and private problems and possibilities. We live complex lives and it is not always apparent where our private concerns and hopes intersect with public - and even international - realities. Furthermore, every institution, structure and system feature interstices that make their seemingly monolithic status subject to individual and small group contestation. It is through class, race, gender and other identities that we experience our lives; however, we must realize that the most powerful secular power in the world, viz., the international regime(s) of capitalism (as well as its ally, the class State), is most responsible for the borders and structures that our agency inevitably must confront.

The citizen-worker concept suggest a person who has developed the critical ability to see labour in all of its human dimensions. Obviously, work does not occur only on paid labour sites; in fact, work is to be understood as synonymous with the historic human struggle to convert recalcitrant social and physical phenomena into conditions that are supportive of our attempts to become more human. The term citizen suggest membership in a polity that transcends religious affiliation, race/ethnicity, gender, sexual preference, etc.<sup>5</sup> It is as citizen-workers that we can most effectively struggle to expand the realities, experiences and areas of freedom and equity beyond the confines of their original, limited bourgeois origins. Rousseau taught us that politics was more than the art of rulers, and this radical insight helped bring the European masses onto the historical stage. Etienne Balibar (1994: x) explains that, Marx went beyond the bourgeois citizen-as-agent and argued for seeing politics as heteronomous because "the 'truth' and 'reality' of politics is not within itself ... but outside ... in its 'external' conditions and objects". Marx was among the first to comprehend that in formally treating all citizens as though they were equal, and/or alike, the liberal State was not neutral, but instead taking sides - because of the highly unequal distribution of property, income and wealth. "Marx was not convinced that capitalism featured a clearly distinct separation of politics and economics; in fact, it was his understanding of the political economy that led him to see weaknesses in . . . bourgeois democracy" (Brosio, 1994: 196). Balibar (1994: x-xi) explains further that he is "not thinking of reductionist or economicist views which amount to a negation of politics, and have been attributed to Marx by some vulgar readings . . . Marx has . . . identified the political process (in which individuals and groups are active) with the complete ... contradictions intrinsic to its 'other': the 'economic' field in the broad sense. Therefore politics in Marx is not negated . . . on the contrary it is dialectically *recreated* as a more effective process. It becomes 'class politics' . . . [Furthermore,] (... the revolutionary class), constantly *crosses the border* of 'the political,' . . . This is the case because it has to face the consequences of the fact that labor is an antagonistic social relation, in which there is exploitation and domination, which leaves no aspect of social life and personal life in ... society unaffected. Hence the apparent paradox: in order to reassert the collective importance of (collective) *autonomy in politics*, meaning 'the people' (now basically defined as the working people), Marx the radical democrat had to deny the autonomy of the political".

## Late/global capitalism and the postmodernist response

Let us examine capitalism's current global imperium in terms of the postmodernist intellectual/artistic response to this stupendous extension of commodification and the related attempt to make everyone subject to market outcomes. Barry Finger (1995: 6-7) has argued that "capitalism is in a period of economic and social retrenchment and the political forces that oversee the system cannot but reflect this dynamic. This requires not only the downsizing of the labour force . . . and its subjugation to an increased pace and intensity of work, but also calls for a parallel reduction in overhead, including the overhead represented by the welfare state". Daniel Singer writes that:

by the [nineteen] eighties, the logic of capitalism was triumphant. Your value was your salary or rather your income . . . You were worth what you could get, by hook or crook. When you argued that in a highly unequal society there was a bias in favour of parties representing the wealthy, you were answered in London that the employers finance one side and unions the other . . . The eighties were not only the decade of privatization . . . [but] a frontal attack on the very idea of a different approach to public or . . . social service. People were being persuaded that the post office, the railways, the schools and the hospitals can be run only on commercial lines . . . The ruthless application of capitalist logic is meeting resistance . . . however, [it] is still against "abuses" rather than the system itself. We must welcome all the attempts to curb the power of money . . . We must do so, however, without illusions. In a highly unequal society, money will always manage to prevail. Our age is the epoch of the highest, and it is hoped last, stage of capitalism. It has penetrated into every nook and cranny of our society (1995: 20).<sup>6</sup>

Most postmodernists grant that capitalism is the predominant power in this historical period; however, their analyses describe societies where the instances of this power are so complex, multicausal, pervasive and victim-assisted that it appears difficult to critique, analyze and construct transformative action against the outer fortifications of the seemingly nonexistent headquarters of the international war against democracy. Furthermore, the individual and/or collective agents are portrayed as not being able to ascertain the complexities of their lived experiences; relatedly, postmodernists are pessimistic about our ability to communicate effectively with one another - in part because of weak cognition and the absence of a lingua franca. Jacques Derrida's discussion of meaning stresses the "inescapable open-endedness and mutability of context. This causes the instability . . . of signifiers as well, rendering even a 'a highly historicist and dialectical notion of "universal truth" ... ' untenable" (Ingram, 1990: 199). If what Derrida claims is accurate, then there is little hope of getting beyond mere conversation. Michel Foucault is suspicious of "the universalist emancipatory claims made on behalf of Western rationalism. He . . . emphasizes the discontinuities . . . that render ideas of historical progress and universal reason highly problematic" (Ibid: 200). In the absence of a powerful political movement capable of making *bona fide* democracy and rough egalitarianism hegemonic, Foucault's arguments against the oppressive universalist claims of the present status quo are of great importance to persons who are without power and are relegated to the boundaries or condemned to live in free-fire zones within the regime of capital. However, if Jean-François Lyotard is correct, then the social subject of the future will not even feel her/his loss of freedom but will instead come to resemble a character in a Bergman cinema who disappears into the grainy dots of the film itself. Speaking of deconstruction, Lyotard (Ibid: 203-04) writes: "The social subject itself seems to dissolve in ... [the] dissemination of language games. The social bond ... is not woven within a single thread, (but) by the intersection of at least two ( ... [or] an indeterminate number of) language games obeying different rules". This argument poses a serious threat to those who have attempted to find middle ground between transcendently connected certainty and the relativism characterized by the claim that anyone's opinion is as good/valid as anybody else's.

John McGowan thinks, in agreement with Fredric Jameson, that postmodernists fear that we are witnessing "the apotheosis of capitalism" through its "prodigious" expansion into previously uncommodified areas. Late capitalism is fearfully portrayed as the totalized terrain of contemporary



life. Some postmodernist critics hope to transform this emerging monolith into a new kind of pluralism. However, McGowan cautions that, "in keeping with their primary concerns with cultural issues, postmodernist artists and intellectuals focus not on economic practices and institutions of late capitalism but on ... colonization of culture's signifying patterns ... " (1993: 17). I maintain that the hegemonic control of signification is backed by economic and coercive power. Jameson's situating of postmodernism as a part of the current stage of capitalism permits us to understand interrelationships within larger contexts. Jameson views the global, yet United Statesian, postmodern culture as the 'superstructural' expression of recent waves of U.S. military and economic domination, viz., the notorious New World Order. Actually, Jameson sees cultural phenomena in terms of a skin or husk that clings to and provides the outer part of the internal economic system. In his mind the inner and outer are organically related. Jameson provides a useful periodization by connecting postmodernism to the stage of late capitalism - an idea borrowed from Ernest Mandel's *Late Capitalism* (1972). Mandel sees capitalist development as having gone from a market to a monopoly or imperial form and currently to its multinational or late phase. This contemporary phase is not inconsistent with Marx's great modernist analysis; although, late capitalism has eliminated nearly every precapitalist organization. Jameson is convinced that late capitalism represents its "purest form". Representational attempts to come to grips with these crucial socioeconomic political developments have been correspondingly periodized by Jameson (1991) as: realism, modernism and postmodernism. In Jameson's view, a pedagogical political cultural must be developed in order to empower people with some sense of place within the global system under capitalist aegis. He has admitted that this needed ability to 'map' is, in fact, a different way of describing a new form of class consciousness. The postmodernist response to late capitalism has not succeeded in helping us to 'map' the New World Order. The discomfort manifested by many liberals and social democrats, as well as postmodernists, from thinking holistically, and to the system's core, are impediments to what Jameson urges intellectuals and artists to achieve educationally. The postmodernist attack upon (or doubt about) the possibilities for grasping the big picture or totality of the capitalist hegemon can provide support for Rightist theorists who maintain that society works in terms of microevents. Relatedly, this is often interpreted as, "a society ... left to market forces is better than a consciously planned society" (Sarup, 1989: 133).

Marx's modernist representational genius explained how the capitalism that was observable through its daily, banal socioeconomic activities was, in part, a mask for a demonic, nefarious, Faustian underworld system. Unfortunately, postmodernist intellectuals and artists have not succeeded in portraying and explaining the continuing remorseless, demonic logic of capitalist development during the last years of the twentieth century. Marshall Berman (1982) explains the brilliance of the *Manifesto's* portrayal in terms of its attempt to come to grips with Frankensteinian capitalism in the nineteenth century. He is convinced that we are not safely past the problems - and possibilities caused by "All that is solid melts into air". David Harvey has written that a sea-change in cultural, political and economic practices has occurred since circa 1970. "While simultaneity in shifting dimensions of time and space is no proof of necessary or causal connection, strong *a priori* grounds can be adduced for the proposition that there is some kind of necessary relation between the rise of postmodernist cultural forms, and a new round of 'time-space compression' in the organization of capitalism. But these changes, when set against the basic rules of capitalist accumulation, appear more as shifts in surface appearance rather than as signs of the emergence of some entirely new postcapitalist or even postindustrial society" (1980: vii). Because capitalism is still fundamentally the same and paramount in its global power, the current cultural response is not without historical precedent and continuity. Furthermore, postmodernist responses should attempt to feature explanations and portrayals of the current base of capitalism - instead of celebrating its alleged novelty while parading the impotence of the celebrants.

Harvey asserts that what has come to be called postmodernism represents, for the most part, the seemingly logical extension of the market's power over the whole range of cultural production. The merging of popular culture with cultural production during late capitalism has been caused,

importantly, by newly developed technologies driven by market logic. Moreover, there does not appear to be adequate self-reflection or critique of what is being produced. These facts have led "many to accuse postmodernism of a simple and direct surrender to commodification, commercialization and the market ..." (Ibid: 59). McGowan makes clear how Jameson's insights are of crucial importance to understanding this period of capitalism, its cultural skin and the specific problems of representation.

Postmodern culture, with its endless projection of disconnected, decontextualized images, breaks down the systematic underpinnings of meaning, and Jameson can only conclude that poststructural celebrations of the random and heterogeneous merely reinforces the larger cultural dynamic. [In Jameson's words:] "If ... the subject has lost its capacity actively to extend its pro-tensions and retensions across the temporal manifold to organize its past and future into coherent experience, it becomes difficult ... to see how the cultural productions of such a subject could result in anything but 'heaps of fragments' ..." For Jameson, the fact that such a subject now exists is comprehensible, but he sees no reason to identify the disease with the cure. The problem of late capitalism's "total system" is that it is so large and so complex that the subject can no longer "think the impossible totality of the contemporary world system ..." [But] to think fragments ... only indicates the desperate straits we are in (1993: 156--57).

One of the most important educational-political challenges facing us is the need to convince students and others that developing big picture understandings of a very complex series of small pictures is both necessary and possible. Without a collective generational attempt to grasp intellectually - in a secular empirical way - the capitalist colossus, the possibilities for genuine participatory democracy within communities of shared meanings and concerns (although also respectful of differences) are not good. Perhaps educators and researchers must seek to establish commonalities - while giving needed attention to differences - within the human experience. Obviously, this attempt to articulate commonalities in the human condition is not meant to aid the political Right; contrarily, it stems from my conviction that it is imperative to seek equity, justice and participation based upon our common memberships in the human race. As I have already written, collective political organization based on the categories of worker and citizen are more promising than identity politics per se when it comes to building coalitions that are capable of resisting and hopefully overcoming the present capitalist global imperium.

### **Radical democratic agency: Differentiation, identity, new social groups and the persistence of class**

The wonderful variety of human beings must be recognized and celebrated; furthermore, it is obvious that each and every person must have a voice in determining what their identities are to be. In order to avoid the possible unintentional failure to include every nuance of real or alleged difference within the human experience we must construct a just and inclusive polity-society within which heterogeneous peoples can find political, socioeconomic, cultural, racial, ethnic, gender and sexual preference justice. In spite of what the Right has argued historically, and especially stridently presently, it is possible to create a progressive project within which each and every person can enjoy greater safety, better education, economic opportunity, political voice and other characteristics of a commonly agreed upon good life. I am not talking about miracles but of achievable improvements through the exercise of theoretically informed broad coalition politics that address the structural impediments that have prevented the emergence of *bona fide* participatory democracy. As Ernesto Laclau has argued, "if there is no 'objective' historical tendency for the social to emerge as a homogeneous subject that would coincide with the empty universality of the opposite to the 'individual,' then any 'social' management will be by historically limited ... actors. As a result, the radicality of ... politics will not result from the emergence of a subject that can embody the universal, but from the expansion and multiplication of fragmentary, partial and limited subjects who enter the collective decision-making process ... A radical and plural democracy involves the multiplication of ... constituencies by which the social management of production is determined. The various

identities arising from the fragmentation of the labour process, the different categories of workers, social and racial differences - as well as those produced by the effects of environmental exploitation on the whole population - all have a stake ..." (1990: xiv-xv).

Edward Sampson has written that "a variety of collective movements - including women, gay males and lesbians, African Americans and members of the Third World - in arguing that members have been denied their own voice in establishing the conditions of their own lives and in determining their own identity and subjectivity, pose a serious problem to psychology's suitability as a discipline capable of responding to the full diversity of human nature" (1993: 1219). Sampson relates his psychological concerns to politics. He explains that the politics of identity are based upon the fact that dominant groups have labeled subaltern people as the 'other'; furthermore, the labelers have judged the labeled as substandard when measured against hegemonic criteria of what should be. The recognition of arbitrary exercises of power vis-à-vis social construction makes a politics of identity necessary and potentially progressive because the constructed labels lack innateness. According to Sampson (Ibid: 1223), "because power is exercised psychologically [and in other ways], in and through the manner by which persons' identities ... are constituted, some groups are dominated through the very characterization of their identities and personality. They cannot even enter into conversations without sustaining their dominated position because their speaking positions have been defined on the basis of the very domination they hope to challenge". Sampson recognizes the need for power in order to solve the problems raised by identity politics. He admits that intervention by psychological experts is not adequate to the task. In his words: (Ibid: 1227) "I am not describing a purely 'mental' process . . . The terms by which an identity is realized also describe the actual material realities within which those lives are lived". This psychological analysis is based on a realization that voice is most meaningful when it helps produce collective action that can transform systems which are responsible for injustices - from physical hunger to more sophisticated but still real assaults on personhood and spirit.

Although explanatory representations and portrayals are necessary during this mostly inadequate postmodernist cultural response to late capitalism and global imperium - and granting the connections between psychological states and socioeconomic political conditions - it is worrisome that all too often adherents of identity politics and multiculturalism seem unable or unwilling to consider the structural conditions that must be altered if the future they apparently favour is to be realized. Henry Louis Gates (1993: 115) charges that many proponents of Afrocentrism have relied on a pop-psychology vocabulary of various recovery movements currently widespread in the U.S. He points out that when conservative opponents charge that the "Afrocentric movement is dangerously 'politicized,' they've got it backward. The trick of [some forms of] Afrocentrism is to have supplanted real politics with a kind of group therapy. It seeks to redress the problem of poor self-esteem rather than of poor life chances". Moreover, the dearth of seriously disruptive oppositional politics throughout societies that are characterized as capitalist and formally democratic is evidence of how difficult it is to get beyond necessary, brief psychological relief and/or victories in the classroom, editor's office and art studio. Robert McChesney has articulated well the thesis being put forward in this section; moreover, he connects his misgivings with perceived weaknesses in postmodernist thought.

Cultural studies, with its dismissal of institutional relations and emphasis on the capacity of audiences to decode messages "oppositionally," has been especially prone to reactionary utilization . . . In grand irony, a major advertising agency . . . now uses a seminal work in cultural studies in its training session as a text in how advertisers might better influence consumers. Divorced from any notion that radical social change is possible, the relativism of the early 1980s has gradually degenerated into a politically fashionable antirationalism. Some of this has been fueled by the influence of postmodernism and poststructuralism. The argument which rejected the universality and neutrality of mainstream social science has evolved into a rejection of the very notions of truth, rationality, reason, logic, and evidence. This is a phenomenon across the academic left, but it is most pronounced in literature and communication [McChesney is a professor of journalism and mass communications], where symbolic interpretation has traditionally been more



influential. This is a striking rejection of the enlightenment project; of the notion that all humans share the capacity to reason and that ... [it] could be used to liberate the species. To the contrary, we are informed that science is a white male invention to maintain hegemonic rule over the "other," and that there is no such thing as truth. Linked to anti-racist and anti-sexist sentiments, these irrationalist claims can even sound progressive, but critical scholars need to evaluate them with the greatest care. Historically, reason has been the weapon of the oppressed . . . Moreover, the last great wave of irrationalism ... led directly to the emergence of ... [fascism]. If we abandon the notion that all people share certain fundamental qualities and capacities and are capable of reason, we open the door to justification for treating people fundamentally differently. And when that happens, it is rarely the dispossessed who call the shots (1994: 31-2).<sup>7</sup>

Cornel West thinks that Marxist theory is still indispensable (although ultimately inadequately unreconstructed) as a methodological orientation for dealing with forms of Afro-American oppression. Marxist theory is both materialist and historical in its attempt to understand and explain certain forms of oppression in terms of complex relations between "extra-discursive formations" to "discursive operations". In West's (1987: 81) interpretation, "classical Marxists view this relation in terms of a more or less determining base and a more or less determined superstructure; whereas neo-Marxists understand this relation as (in Raymond Williams' famous phrase) 'the mutual setting of limits and exerting of pressures'. The explanatory power of Marxist theory resides precisely in the specifying of the complex relation of base and superstructure, limits and pressures, extra-discursive formations and discursive operations, that is, in establishing with precision the nature of determination. This problem remains unresolved in the Marxist tradition while the most impressive efforts remain those enacted in the best of Marx's own textual practices". Attempting to see things holistically - i.e., grasping as much of the totality as possible - allows us to understand that "specific conflicts on the various levels of society are linked to one another, while the specificity of one level is neither identical with nor reducible to a mirror image of the specificity of another level. Yet the articulation of these specific conflicts within and across various spheres constitutes a 'totality' because the relations of these conflicts are not arbitrary or capricious" (Ibid: 81-2). Even though myopic self-serving and even racist and patriarchal motives have often prevailed, I maintain that the conceptual framework of marxist thought is "universal" with reference to its logical inclusivity. People of color, women, gay persons, lesbians and others can be considered as workers; furthermore, they must be included within the benefits of citizenship - in de facto terms. Eric Olin Wright has written that to claim class structure limits class consciousness/formation is not to argue that it determines them solely. Obviously, other factors such as race, ethnicity, gender and extra-economic structures operate within the limits established by class structure. Moreover, politically significant explanations help explain variations in class consciousness/formations. However, "these non-class mechanisms operate with limits imposed by the class structure itself" (Wright, 1985: 29).

Carol Smith, drawing on E. P. Thompson's work, has stressed that class is a historical formation arising from struggle. Struggle is prior to, and more universal than class itself. In fact, "people find themselves in a society structured in determined ways (crucially, but not exclusively, in productive relations), they . . . identify points of antagonistic interests, they commence to struggle around these issues and in the process . . . they discover themselves as classes, they come to know this ... as class-consciousness" (Smith, 1987: 200).<sup>8</sup> Smith conceptualizes the likelihood of progressive, liberatory consciousness emerging from shared material conditions in the following terms:

Subjective beliefs ... remain attached to material conditions, but dialectically ... Revolutionary consciousness ... is never directly or solely the outcome of specific material ... circumstances. It emerges from the interplay of material and ideological practices as they are worked out in the political conflicts of a given class relationship . . . The classes that emerge from such struggles may or may not hold a single objective with respect to their material circumstances, but they will hold a single and opposed interest with respect to those classes ... in opposition to them. These classes do not necessarily correspond to those one would define by using the universalist concepts of a materialist conception of history. But neither are they or their interests detached from their particular (historically given) material interests (Ibid: 203-04).

Smith argues that in some specific contexts getting rid of capitalism is not sufficient to achieve social justice. In Guatemala, no solution would be just if indigenous people, who labour, continue to be sacrificed at the altar of the needed surplus creation thought to be crucial to build a society free from necessity.

In the end, I am still convinced that beyond the need to recognize the reasons for and existence of new social groups and identity politics as well as their interactive relationships with social class and economy, Istvan Meszaros is correct to hold that "there cannot be social transformation without agency and that the only agency conceivable under the present condition ... is labour in the sense that Marx was talking about and which we must rediscover for ourselves under ... present conditions" (Editorial Comment, 1993: 12). Marx is still relevant because capitalism remains the most powerful secular force on earth; furthermore, it is capitalism in crisis that most importantly shapes the terrain upon which the politics of identity are played out. Meszaros reminds us of Marcuse's attempt to theorize a replacement for labour from among the intellectuals and outcasts "but neither of them had the power to implement change . . . The only force which can introduce change and make it work is society's producers" (Ibid: 20). As we have seen, Marx did not choose the proletariat of his time as the class that could accomplish a revolutionary transformation from capitalist contradictions and injustices toward socioeconomic justice and participatory democracy because they suffered most, but because of his assessment that their position on the map of socioeconomic and political realities was central. I argue that this is still true if we reconceptualize what it means to be a worker during the last years of the twentieth century.

My conception of citizen-worker does not intend to exclude the importance of race/ethnicity, gender or sexual preference identities. Citizen-worker is dependent upon an overarching idea of being human related to Marx's idea of species-being.<sup>9</sup> During the strike for civil rights prompted by the sanitation workers' strike in Memphis, Tennessee in 1968, television pictures showed black demonstrators wearing signs that proclaimed: "I am a Man!" If it were today, it would read: "I am a human being!" The emphasis upon membership within the same genus and species should make arguments and practices of oppression/discrimination/exclusion unacceptable; unfortunately, it does not. Racist, sexist, elitist, homophobic, misogynist - as well as classed - language and practices seek to divide our common humanity and cast some of us into the wilderness. If working class were constructed in ways that more accurately reflect the worlds of work characterizing the regime of capital, it would open up spaces for discourse and action helping us realize the commonalities within work and among workers. As I have argued, it is around the idea of citizen-worker that it is most possible to build broad, radical democratic coalitions that are necessary to push against capital's current offensive aimed at a more complete global imperium.

It is necessary in this climate of opinion to reiterate that my privileging citizen-worker as the most effective category for collective agency is *not* a Trojan Horse for maintaining white, male, paid labour supremacy for critical Leftist analysis - and hopefully, action. The natural leaders who emerge from among citizen-workers can, and must, be representative of the whole range of persons whose basic interests are served by unmasking, resisting and defeating a hegemonic system - backed by the threat of physical coercion - that continues to make history behind our backs. If racism were eliminated, capitalism could survive. Capitalism could coexist with gender equity - at least theoretically.<sup>10</sup> However, if the most powerful system of hierarchy and bossism were to be dismantled by those of us committed to participatory democratic power being brought to bear upon the conditions that affect our lives, it is more probable that we could construct a good society characterized by fairness to all of the diverse members of the human family. This is not to argue that patriarchy, racial/ethnic injustice and discrimination against gays and lesbians are characteristics of capitalist societies alone. But in this historical period the construction of a genuine, inclusive participatory democracy demands the overcoming of capital's regime. It is through enhanced citizen-worker political power that improvements insisted on by adherent's of identity politics can best be achieved. It is upon the terrain of the conflicting imperatives between democracy and capitalism where various demands for justice and equity are being fought.

The German feminist and marxist, Frigga Haug, has tried to establish Rosa Luxemburg's relevance to the contemporary women's movement. "Noting that Luxemburg had ... little to say about the actual oppression of women, Haug nevertheless finds her conception of revolution directly relevant to the women's movement. Luxemburg's basic approach makes revolutionary change possible by highlighting, a process of self-emancipation that grows out of women's experience in struggle. The search for useful ideas for a women's politics led us to Rosa Luxemburg. She led us to a project of revolutionizing politics in general. Wherever we were able to find something useful or important for women's politics it turned out to imply a critique of views which think of politics as something coming from above, of the party as a form of which those lower down have to serve . . . [Luxemburg insisted that] political struggle must be conducted at every level. It includes the use of language, the experiences of the many in social relations where spontaneous feelings attach themselves to the very bonds from which people must liberate themselves . . . The ability to bring about change grows out of people's own activity" (Reynolds, 1994: 296). Marx and Gramsci would agree with Rosa Luxemburg. Daniel Singer (1994: 70) reminds us that the capitalist establishment "is not worried by sporadic rebellions or 'postmodern' antics. What it fears is that social discontent, the protest of women, the revolt of the ecologists should be joined together for long-term action by the vision of a radically different society. Its propagandists have [tried] to convince people that there is no alternative and there can be none!"

The great intellectual/artistic/educational/political challenge of this historical period is to create understandable representations and portrayals of the socioeconomic, political and cultural realities that structure our lives. Capitalism's totalizing hegemony and direct power as it is mediated through identity and other human characteristics - seems unrepresentable at this time for all too many people; therefore, the proponents of socioeconomic justice and bona fide political representation are stymied, in part, by the inability to grasp the whole and their relationships to it as well as to others. Because postmodernist representation is often fixed on disconnected decontextualized images, celebrations of randomness and claims of allegedly unprecedented complexity, it becomes increasingly difficult for us to understand possible relations and causalities. Relatedly, as we have seen, the positing of a decentered, incoherent, fragmentary epistemic subject makes opposition to antidemocratic capitalism, racism and gender injustice more difficult. I do not blame the carrier of bad news for reporting accurately: many human actors do seem to be as many postmodernists and others describe; however, an educative, progressive and liberatory project can help us understand our individual and collective potential. Ordinary men, women and children can understand and then act upon their insights and hopes. There have been other complex times which featured formidable enemies of justice and equity; however, on many happy occasions brave human beings pushed the democratic imperative forward - at much cost to themselves. Insight and bravery have not been eliminated by late capitalism's attempt to colonize the everyday of this postmodernist landscape.

Chantal Mouffe (1991: 123) has asserted that the goal of radical democracy is to deepen and broaden its power through successful connecting of diverse peoples and struggles. In her view, "such a task requires the creation of new subject-positions that would allow the common articulation for . . . antiracism, antisexism, and anti capitalism . . . according to the principle of democratic equivalence". As the reader of this essay knows, I have argued for broad democratic coalitions throughout. However, the concept of equivalence is still problematic as has also been argued throughout. My privileging of the citizen-worker as the concept to organize around is an attempt to resolve the problem involved in going beyond Marx's idea of the proletariat as the agent for historical change but avoiding a relativism and/or equivalence that may be motivated or caused by a desire to please rather than an insistence upon diagnosis/evaluation based upon sober study of our current situation. Jay Stone (1994: 106-07) writes: "Doesn't radical democracy's rejection of class essentialism and [ even] vanguardism in favor of the radical relativization and dispersal of sites and subjects of social struggle devolve, ultimately, into a form of ... theoretical and strategic relativism that makes social knowledge and judgement impossible? Is radical democracy ... a politics

with a clear political agenda and a strategy for achieving it or is it a vague and ambiguous wedding of . . . [all too many parts] which lacks substance, purpose, and direction? For example, if feminist struggles to preserve abortion rights, environmentalist efforts to preserve national forests, and anticapitalist efforts to challenge the hypermobility of capital (and countless other struggles) are all equally important aspects of a radical democratic agendas, how does the democratic left prioritize its critique and its efforts so as to accurately understand the dynamics of power and effectively combat the contemporary neoconservative hegemony? Without some kind of prioritization marxists worry that the democratic left consigns itself to political impotence and theoretical incoherence". I would argue that although the current Rightist onslaught upon the welfare state in the U.S. represents a complex coalition, its focus has been on the attempt to make each and every United Statesian subject to market outcomes. There are analogies to this situation elsewhere in the world. For example, the fundamentalist religious spear throwers, family values advocates, antiabortionists, militia crazies, private school champions are important to the Rightist reaction in the U.S. but the goods are delivered to those who understand, when push comes to shove, that the regime of capital is at the top of the priority list. This is not because of 'reductionism' but because the Right understands the central importance of the political economy even if many on the Left do not. It is obvious that one cannot establish insights and praxes based upon a reconsidered, reconstructed democratic marxist project by fiat. If Marx's central insight that the political economy was the prize for organized workers to seek is to be adhered to during these times, then the arguments for the continued relevance of his insights must be made and won. The identification of democratic marxism with the debacle in Eastern Europe and elsewhere does not make it too likely that these crucial arguments will prove convincing. However, it could be that the demise of state socialism in the former Eastern Bloc will provide possibilities for contemporary persons to see the liberatory and remarkably sound ideas (vis-a-vis a still functioning capitalism) of Marx and the marxists who were and are committed to the idea that: men and women can make their own histories; albeit not under conditions of their own choosing.

I accept Ernesto Laclau's and Chantal Mouffe's description of where and how arguments among radical democratic Leftists will occur. Drawing from Hans-Georg Gadamer's work they argue that, although there is no foundation upon which Leftist theory could claim essential, timeless and universal stability, it is possible to form reasonable judgments, to prioritize and prefer certain political positions over others - so that extreme relativism is circumvented. Arguments based upon the apodicticity of conclusions are ones that do not allow plural interpretations; whereas, those that are based upon the verisimilitude of conclusions do permit varied interpretations. The logic of verisimilitude is public and democratic; moreover, this must be central to a genuinely democratic society. There must be room for pluralism of agency in the kind of oppositional struggle and politics being favoured herein. One plausible argument to be made upon this non-foundational pluralist terrain reads as follows: although no absolute privileging of class is tenable "it is possible to argue for a prioritization of economic justice issues for a radical democratic political coalition in a contingent sense. Consequently, Marxist critiques of capitalism continue to have a vital role to play in any imaginable future democratic left, and radical democratic theory can accommodate a contingent prioritization of economic justice issues . . . Moreover, radical democracy is not implacably hostile to some reformed notion of class analysis or the politics of class understood in a ... contingent sense. Simultaneously, elements of a reformed Marxist project, far from being obsolete and useless at the close of the Cold War and the dawn of the twenty-first century, can be seen ... [as] of renewed relevance. The Marxist critique of capitalism and the fetishism of commodities, in particular, offer powerful ... ideological weapons of critique to those on the Left".

## Postscript

I submit that the following portrayal of "Subcommander" Marcos would provide an interesting dialogic partner for the young Marx of the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* of 1844 as well as

those of us who are involved in this issue of *Access*. The Zapatistas issued this communique after the *San Francisco Chronicle* quoted Marcos, the voice of the Chiapas Zapatistas, as saying he had been fired from restaurant work in San ' Francisco for being gay. " Marcos is gay in San Francisco, black in South Africa ... a Chicano in San Ysidro [California] ... a Mayan Indian in San Cristóbal, a gang member in Neza [a huge Mexico City slum] ... a communist in the post-Cold War era ... a housewife alone on Saturday night in ... any city in Mexico ... a striker in the CTM [the giant progovernment union federation which virtually never authorizes strikes] ... a single woman on the metro at 10 p.m., a peasant without land, an unemployed worker . . . a dissident amid free-market economics . . . and, of course, a Zapatista in the mountains of southeast Mexico . . . So Marcos is a human being, any human being, in this world. Marcos is all the exploited, marginalized, and oppressed . . . [persons], resisting and saying, ' Enough!' " (Editorial Comment: 1994, 1).

## Notes

1. Given at the Ohio Valley Philosophy of Education Society's annual meeting in Indianapolis, Indiana on October 21, 1994. It will be published in the Society's proceedings called *Philosophical Studies In Education*.
2. My use of the term citizen derives from Rousseau and does not exclude participation and equal treatment for persons living within a particular polity but who are not formally citizens. Instead, the intention is to stress political and personal rights that can be claimed within societies that are de jure republics or representative democracies. Furthermore, I do not wish to preclude necessary international cooperation. Unfortunately, current political and personal rights are situated within nation-states, for the most part, rather than within international contexts. Obviously, citizen-workers must mobilize on a global scale in order to confront the international power of capital and its unelected political machinery like the IMF, World Bank and U. N. I wish to thank my colleague, Professor Huey-li Li for helping me clarify this point.
3. Kovel realized that the workers of the late nineteenth century struggled against capitalism while living in a precapitalist and sometimes communitarian culture. This is in contrast to the late twentieth century when citizen-workers are embedded in and surrounded by the thickness of capitalism. Henri Lefebvre's concept of capitalism's colonization of the everyday-especially since 1945-supports Kovel's argument.
4. Rachel Sharp has articulated well the dangers of abandoning the centrality of social class for purposes of radical analysis and struggle. Speaking of Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis's movement from *Schooling in Capitalist America* (1976) to their *Democracy and Capitalism* (1986) she explains how in the authors' "anxiety" to see things as more complex and open they seem to have abandoned any sense of structural boundaries that limit human agency. As I have written elsewhere about Sharp's insight: "Behind this theoretical shift lies an important change in sociopolitical practice, namely ... that most class struggles in Western societies have not been informed by a revolutionary analysis of capitalism; furthermore, most popular struggles have been articulated in liberal terms. In true liberal fashion, Bowles and Gintis now support the primacy of politics and agency, and are reluctant to be tied to anything other than the rules of the game, which can be changed ... This theoretical position ... [is] more descriptive than analytic, partly because it eschews any attempt to discern what is causally prior. Sharp strikes a bull's-eye when she points out that intrinsic to Bowles and Gintis's theoretical direction lies a failure to recognize and admit that in certain circumstances structures permit few alternatives . . . Striking another on-target criticism, Sharp writes that by identifying economicism, mechanistic determinism, functionalism and reductionism as their bêtes noires, Bowles and Gintis speak of the possibilities of resistance in many places and by many different types of persons and groups; furthermore, they insist on the 'uniqueness and specificity of each social formation and historical conjuncture. History is complex-and open. Hurrah! But is it? Is history open for most people just because it's complex, or because no Archimedean ground can be found at this time?" (Brosio, 1992: 434).
5. I wish to share the following passage with you in order to fortify my position with regard to the need for seeing a society-culture as it is, even though one can privilege certain memberships for organizational and structural purposes. Writing of the celebrations for the fiftieth anniversary of



Victory in Europe, Katha Pollitt argues that the American nostalgia for 1945 is hardly based on what that year was really like. "We hear a great deal today ... about how terrible it is that blacks, women, gays and other smaller social subgroups want both equality and the right to self-definition. Why, goes the plaintive cry, can't we all just be plain Americans? ... The answer ... is that we are not all 'just plain Americans' but are complexly embedded in overlapping hierarchies of gender, race, ethnicity, class. Why should it be impermissible to acknowledge this, and to make politics on the basis of this truth?" (Pollitt, 1995: 713).

6. Speaking of the United States specifically, Thomas Ferguson writes that "What matters is the ... 'chain reaction' that now threatens to blow apart the political system. This chain reaction begins with the desperate economic squeeze a largely unregulated world economy now places on ordinary Americans. It leads ... to the decay of public services ... that sustain families and communities, including schools. In the end, it makes the daily lives of more and more Americans increasingly unbearable" (Ferguson, 1994: 797). From my conversations with colleagues in New Zealand and Australia, it has been apparent that conditions in those countries are similar to those in the U.S. - obviously with important historical, national and cultural differences.
7. See chapter thirteen "The Challenge of Postmodernism to the Enlightenment Project and Its Democratic Legacy" in Brosio, *A Radical Democratic Critique of Capitalist Education* - for a supportive analysis of McChesney's reference to the enlightenment project.
8. Perry Anderson has criticized this position when Thompson articulated it because the former was convinced that it is too subjective to assume that whenever a group considers itself as a class it necessarily is the case.
9. "The species-being of man [woman] means that although there ... [may be] men and women in various distorted forms during particular historical periods, the forms we see them in is not quintessentially what ... the species, could and should be. Marx sees the nature of man [woman] as characterized by an essential ability to make a project within the mind and then to erect it in reality ... [We] are driven to liberate ... [our] selves from oppressive conditions because of ... [our] intrinsic need to achieve self-realization" (Brosio, 1985: 80).
10. "Is there a relationship between homosexual liberation and socialism? ... I pose it because it's entirely conceivable that we will one day live miserably in a thoroughly ravaged world in which lesbians and gays can marry and serve openly in the army and that's it. Capitalism can absorb a lot" (Kushner, 1994: 4).

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