

## To find the new world in a critique of the old: The contribution of marxism to education

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### ABSTRACT

Marxism should seek neither to escape from a full understanding of the reasons for its recent negative trajectory, nor quit the field in favour of either modernist liberalism or postmodernist fragmentation. Apologetics and defeatism are equally unacceptable. Additionally, with regard to education in particular, marxists have constantly emphasised its imbrication in society and history. So assessments of marxism's contributions to education, made particularly at a time when its standing is parlous or at best problematic, need a clear understanding of the shifting demography of revolutionary aspiration.

### Waxing and waning: Marxism now and then

We gotta get out of this place  
If it's the last thing we ever do  
We gotta get out of this place  
There's a better life for me and you.<sup>1</sup>

In 1994 there appeared the Oxford Illustrated History of Western Philosophy edited by Anthony Kenny (Kenny, 1994). It contains a photo of a statue of Karl Marx in Berlin on the occasion of his one hundred and seventy-third birthday in 1991. Marx is bedecked with garlands of roses, while behind him, pensively peering over his shoulder, stands a small boy sucking his fingers. Below is a card on which is written, 'Du hattest ja so recht' - 'You were so right'. A touching vignette? A surprising tribute? A sly nostalgia?

On May 7 1973, *Time* magazine published a feature article on the remarkable renaissance of Karl Marx. The article manages to combine, in *Time* honoured fashion, a misrepresentation of marxism ('his theory of dialectical materialism ignores the realities of human nature by arguing that economic forces alone shape the fates of men and nations'), with the expected cold war paranoia of looming US defeat in Vietnam.

Better news for *Time*, if not for the left, four years later when, in September 1977 the unmistakable face of Karl Marx appears on the cover accompanied by the verdict - in dramatic red graffiti - 'Marx is dead'. On this occasion associate editor Frederick Painton and Paris correspondent Sandra Burton combined to interview a variety of French philosophers and writers, notably

Andre Glucksmann and Bernard-Henri Levy. They express a dutiful disillusion and disregard for marxism, particularly in the context of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's writing on Stalinist concentration camps. While not included among 'France's new thinkers', Michel Foucault is recorded as organising a ceremony for Soviet dissidents and French intellectuals in a Paris theatre as a counter to the state visit of Leonid Brezhnev, then President of the USSR, in June 1977. The seeds of postmodernist pessimism were sown in these years.

Closer to home, both professionally and geographically, is the ten year Australian career of the influential Monash journal, *Thesis Eleven*. Beginning in 1980 as a new journal working at the crossroads of socialism and scholarship, *Thesis Eleven* sought to address what was described, even then, as a crisis in marxism both as a theory and as a movement. In the opening editorial *Thesis Eleven* declared:

Marxism now exists within a severe fragmentation of knowledge; knowledge is not only separated from practice, but also internally compartmentalised. As a product of, and response to bourgeois society, marxism can hardly be unaffected by the extreme specialisation which is functional to it (1980: 1).

The point then, as now, was not that theory needs to be obliterated only that it needs to be constituted politically (ibid: 4).

Ten years, and twenty-seven issues later, *Thesis Eleven* was considering the world 'after communism' - including its Australian version. Ferenc Feher captures the tone and states the case directly:

Communism, in eastern Europe as well as in general, has squandered long ago the heritage of its own philosophical radicalism. In it the self-deification of creative human activity has been tamed into a blind obedience to a new authority; the Faustian project of industrialism reduced to the level of goulash communism; and the 'permanence of revolution' degraded into the permanence of bureaucratic infighting (1990: 35).

While this is obviously a deeply sobering judgement, Feher is correct to place his emphasis on Europe for it is there that marxism has waned most noticeably in political influence. The labour lawyer Karl Klare recalls:

multitudes crossing through the Wall; Havel and Dubcek greeting crowds from balconies overlooking Wenceslas Square; Solidarity deputies taking seats in the Polish parliament; political demonstrations within sight of the Kremlin ... Tragic images are interspersed with the euphoric: last victims of Ceausescu's security police; students mowed down in Tiananmen Square. The memory will always be vivid of Wang Weilin standing in front of the tanks on a Peking boulevard (1991: 69).

The manic capitalist triumphalism unleashed by these events has been the most notable aspect of the reactionary ideological offensive summed up in the phrase 'new world order'. While not for a minute accepting the assumptions such a phrase holds dear - unfettered US military and economic imperium being among the foremost - we would do well to heed the advice young Marx gave to a pessimistic Arnold Ruge:

even though the construction of the future and its completion for all time is not our task, what we have to accomplish at this time is all the more clear: relentless criticism of all existing conditions, relentless in the sense that the criticism is not afraid of its findings and just as little afraid of conflict with the powers that be (1843: 212)

It is not just the spirit, but the material point of such optimism, that needs to be recaptured in the political reconstitution of marxist theory. As a theory of, and in, history marxism is poorly served by acquiescent resignation. Recognising the need for 'relentless criticism', Jurgen Habermas has recently outlined an agenda for new thinking on the left:

It is not as though the collapse of the Berlin Wall has solved a single one of the problems specific to our system. The indifference of a market economy to its external costs, which it off loads onto

the social and natural environment, is sowing the path of a crisis-prone economic growth, with the familiar disparities and marginalisations on the inside; with economic backwardness, if not regression, and consequently with barbaric living conditions, cultural expropriation, and catastrophic famines in the Third World; not to mention the world wide risk caused by disrupting the balance of nature (1990: 17).

These, albeit sketchy, introductory remarks are designed to converge on two points. Namely that marxism should seek neither to escape from a full understanding of the reasons for its recent negative trajectory, nor quit the field in favour of either modernist liberalism or postmodernist fragmentation. Apologetics and defeatism are equally unacceptable. Secondly, with regard to education in particular, marxists have constantly emphasised its imbrication in society and history. So assessments of marxism's contributions to education, made particularly at a time when its standing is parlous or at best problematic, need a clear understanding of the shifting demography of revolutionary aspiration.

### This wheel's on fire: Marxism and education

And after every plan has failed  
And there was nothing more to tell  
You knew that we should meet again  
If your memory serves you well.<sup>2</sup>

'One more brick in the wall' was a popular song of the late nineteen seventies released by the English group Pink Floyd. In this dirge like round were delivered sentiments as simple and direct as they were misleading and disabling. 'We don't want your education', 'Hey! Teachers leave those kids alone' were among the more prominent pieces of inoperable libertarian advice on offer. Dubious politics notwithstanding, the song captured a mood of concern in educational circles regarding the consumption of knowledge and learning. Child centred educators were particularly touched by this doleful message.

Into this context came a slim volume written by a defrocked European Jesuit based in Cuernavaca, Mexico. *Deschooling Society* (1971) was the tome whose time had come. Ivan Illich was its peripatetic prophet preaching the message of conviviality. While not at all sympathetic to marxism Illich's book - at the time the sole consuming passion at many a radical meal - served an indirectly useful function in generating a marxist critique of education. By focusing on what he saw as the coercive, stultifying, effect of institutional schooling on individual learning, Illich proffered a libertarian critique of society in which, apparently, each individual would be responsible for their own 'deschooling'. Community based 'learning webs' rather than state or church controlled schooling were Illich's preferred route to knowledge and understanding.

It was the critique of this anarcho-liberalism that was to prove decisive. In general terms this pointed to Illich ignoring the structural dimensions of education and schooling, especially the wide spread social inequalities between schools and within them. Moreover, Illich saw schools as merely provisioning the consumption of learning, not producing or reproducing it. Also, he offered an individualistically oriented solution to what was clearly a collective problem of educational inadequacy. Attending school was, and is, a legal requirement. Thus few could, or would, meet Illich's challenge to celebrate their awareness by embarking on a program of voluntary deinstitutionalisation. The labour market needs of capital would see to that. On the other hand, conservatives would later take heart, as they didn't then, from Illich's endorsement of Milton Friedman's notion of educational vouchers whereby consumers could purchase a share of the schooling of their choice. This was to remain a staple of right-wing thinking on educational funding

right through the nineteen eighties. Finally, while Illich was by far the best known educational libertarian, he was not alone. In the United States, the work of Joel Spring, notably his *Primer of Libertarian Education* (1975) and that of his colleagues Clarence Karier and Paul Violas in *Roots of Crisis* (1973) added powerfully to the literature of romantic radicalism.

It was from a background of concern with issues such as these that the contribution of marxism to education in the nineteen seventies and later was to emerge. Broadly speaking it was a contribution shaped and nuanced by the complex evolution of Marx's own writing on the one hand, while reflecting the particular intellectual currents and political imperatives of its various authors on the other. Marxist writing on education at this time reflected a humanist concern for alienation and the development of critical consciousness. It also drew strength from the structuralist account of Marx developed by Louis Althusser in *For Marx* (1969), *Lenin and Philosophy* (1971), and *Reading Capital* (1970) - the latter with Etienne Balibar. This approach relied heavily on Althusser's notions of 'ideological state apparatuses' - of which education was one - and his view of marxism as a scientific theoretical practice. In effect a theoretical anti-humanism. The development of a critique of the political economy of education was also congenial to structuralist marxism. Here the pre-eminent publication of the period was *Schooling in Capitalist America* (1976) by Sam Bowles and Herb Gintis.

Accompanying these was an emphasis on education as cultural reproduction, influentially in Pierre Bourdieu and Claude Passeron's *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (1977), which developed the concepts of habitus and cultural capital. Underlying these contributions was Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony - the process whereby the dominant ideologies of civil society contribute to perpetuating the existing order. Indeed the origins of what is now called 'cultural studies' can be found in the debates initiated by Althusser and Gramsci, particularly as the latter's work found a warm reception in the writing of British marxist Raymond Williams (1980). There was as well the pioneering work undertaken at the University of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies founded by Stuart Hall.

Considered even in this attenuated form it should be clear that marxism's contribution to the literature of education in this period was vital, rich and complex. It gives the lie to a once oft repeated objection that since specific formulations regarding education and schooling were scant in Marx and Engels, their work was of little interest. Whatever their individual perspectives, marxist writers emphasise that education - including all the formal and informal processes involved - is thoroughly intertwined with social, economic and political relations. Education, from a marxist standpoint, has no timeless, universal autonomy. The pith of both Marx's and marxist contributions to education then is to wrest it from the control of capital and place it in the hands of the working class.

When seen from the perspective of education as a discipline for study in the academy, it is clear that the sociology and political economy of education figure prominently as areas of concern for marxists. So, for a time, did philosophy of education. Yet, apart from attacks on the psychology of social control, via intelligence testing, and some half-hearted attempts to fuse Marx and Freud, the field of educational psychology was virtually ignored by marxists. Brian Simon's *Intelligence, Psychology and Education* (1971) stood alone. Similarly, marxists on the whole ignored the fields of educational history and administration. Prolific though the nineteen seventies were for publications on marxism and education the lacunae mentioned regrettably aided the process of academic marginalisation. *Das Kapital* reading groups and ideology study circles sadly would not be enough.

Many marxist educators in the nineteen seventies were strongly influenced by the humanist concerns Marx expresses in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. Foremost amongst these was Istvan Meszaros, a former student of Lukacs, and based at the University of Sussex whose study *Marx's Theory of Alienation* (1970) concludes with a chapter on 'alienation and the crisis in education'. This Meszaros identifies as emanating from a growing realisation that expenditure on arms and warfare (Indo-China principally) distorts education's content and narrows its purpose. Street protests were but the angry expression of a far more deeply rooted estrangement. Meszaros also argued, implicitly against Althusser, that distinctions between the 'young' and the 'mature'

Marx with regard to alienation were spurious. In this he was joined not only by Bertell Ollman whose *Alienation* (1976) presents marxism as a philosophy of internal relations, but also by Douglas Holly. The latter's *Society, Schools and Humanity* (1971) systematically develops a marxist critique of education. Alienation, Holly says, can be seen as the educational process externalised, made instrumental instead of expressive and self-realising. He adds that alienation:

has to do with the basic nature of the social process: it describes a deep seated perversion of human relationships. Indeed teachers in their daily lives probably experience its operation more acutely than almost anyone (1971:97, 99).

Supplementing this perspective was *Marxism and Education* (1978) by Madan Sarup, a work which belied the directness of its title by devoting half its space to a discussion of phenomenology in the then new sociology of education. On marxism and education more properly Sarup merely reviewed much of the existing literature and insisted, unconvincingly, that there was no disjunction between phenomenology and marxism. Perry Anderson's (1976) observation regarding the constant presence of idealism in western marxism identifies a common feature and, from a materialist viewpoint, common problem, in marxist writing on education. A far more intellectually sophisticated, though equally eclectic, version of marxism was developed by Michael Matthews in *The Marxist Theory of Schooling* (1980). Conceived basically as a critique of positivist and empiricist theories of knowledge, this work argues for marxism as an ongoing research program, a term Matthews derives from the work of Imre Lakatos. While the strengths of this book lay in its fine demolition of intelligence testing as a practice in schools, and in its stringent critique of analytical philosophy of education, Matthews exemplifies in full measure the problem identified by Anderson above.

But concerns with pedagogy, particularly with the classroom practice of teachers and their relations with students, were to emerge as a major theme for many marxist educators. Castles and Wustenberg in *The Education of the Future* (1979) examined polytechnical education in Britain and Europe. They recommended the Danish Tvind schools as a model worth exploring. Emphasising the political character of education, these schools promoted learning through useful productive work that endeavoured to develop in children the knowledge and capabilities they needed to both understand and change society. In a similar vein Ollman and Norton offered *Studies in Socialist Pedagogy* (1978) as a collection of radical strategies challenging the traditional hierarchies of knowledge and teaching.

Significant as these were their influence was to be overshadowed by the writing of Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire. Under enforced political exile for more than fifteen years Freire was a thinker often incorrectly joined with the charismatic Ivan Illich. Indeed, it took some time for the real importance of Freire's contribution to become clear - a task that the publication of *Literacy and Revolution: The Pedagogy of Paulo Freire* (Mackie, 1980) assisted. Part of the difficulty lay in Freire's unusual convergence of achievement. An adult educator from a third world country, deviser of a literacy method, Freire's two principal books, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972) and *Cultural Action for Freedom* (1972) contained powerful advocacy for the oppressed everywhere. Freire's insistent debunking of the neutrality of education, recognition of the teacher-student contradiction, and conception of revolutionary praxis all combined to give him impeccable radical credentials. While the extent to which Freire's pedagogy could be called marxist was, and remains, debatable, the authenticity of his humanism and commitment to liberation cannot be disputed.

If Paulo Freire was the epitome of radical education for many in the nineteen seventies, his humanist idealism would receive a powerful and fundamental challenge from the sophisticated structuralist marxism of Louis Althusser. Arguing for a clear distinction between the young Marx - mired in Hegelian idealism - and the mature Marx, whose theory was conceived as a materialist theoretical practice, Althusser addressed the question of how the political power of a ruling class was sustained. In other words, how was its ideological hegemony achieved? To answer this Althusser suggests that ideology represents both the imaginary relationship of individuals to their



real conditions of existence and that ideology has a material existence. The ruling class possesses not only a monopoly of the repressive apparatuses of the state via the police, army and intelligence services, but also secures its ideology via various apparatuses relating to the private activities of citizens or to civil society. The latter are known as ideological state apparatuses, and refer to churches, schools, legal institutions, universities, trade unions and political parties. For Althusser, these components of the ideological state apparatus each possess a 'relative autonomy', and thus become sites for struggles between contending social classes. Consequently, education, teaching, schooling and the curriculum could all be interrogated for their ideological components.

Publications elaborating these concerns were not slow in coming. Kevin Harris' two books, *Education and Knowledge* (1979) and *Teachers and Classes* (1982), along with Rachel Sharp's *Knowledge, Ideology and the Politics of Schooling* (1980) and Michael Apple's *Ideology and Curriculum* (1979) all acknowledged, in differing ways, their debt to Althusser. Joining these was the powerful and pioneering ethnographic study by Paul Willis, *Learning to Labour* (1977). Through an extensive series of transcribed interviews with working class boys, Willis was able to show how the culture of the British Midlands working class resisted the benign, inclusive liberalism of educational policy makers. Focusing on their class, culture and speech Willis demonstrated the working class insight that middle class education was irrelevant to them, while also showing that the cost of such rejection was to be the assumption of shop floor occupations. In his deeply unromantic portrayal of working class lads Willis did not shirk from illustrating the destructive effects of sexism, racism and violence. *Learning to Labour* became highly influential both for its arguments and method. It remains the best known research contribution from Birmingham's Contemporary Cultural Studies Centre.

If Paulo Freire and Paul Willis were two basic staples of marxist education in the seventies, the third could be found in the formidable political economy of American schooling developed by Bowles and Gintis in their *Schooling in Capitalist America* (1976). This work highlights the contradictions of liberal educational reform, dissects the relations between formal education and the requirements of a capitalist economy, while at the same time anticipating future developments. This last point is exemplified in their prescient discussion of how higher education was to be transformed from ivory tower to service station, or perhaps into a hypermarket. The heart of their argument was what they called 'the correspondence principle'. By this Bowles and Gintis contend that:

the education helps integrate youth into the economic system... through a structural correspondence between its social relations and those of production. The structure of social relations in education not only inures the student to the discipline of the workplace, but develops the types of personal demeanour, modes of self-presentation, self-image and social class identifications which are the crucial ingredients of job adequacy (1976: 131).

In this argument can be found the beginnings of a critique of contemporary preoccupations with vocationalism in schooling and education.

The considerable popularity of *Schooling in Capitalist America* was facilitated by the visit of its authors to Australia shortly after the book's publication. Bowles and Gintis came to Sydney for two conferences - one on political economy and the other at the Teachers' Federation auditorium for the Radical Education Group. The latter, attended by eight hundred people, was a major intervention in the public debate on education. Out of this came the launch of *Radical Education Dossier*, a journal whose continued appearance provides the major, perhaps only, link between the optimism of those times and the present.

Notwithstanding these achievements, it is important to note that the proletarian theoretical presence in education was contained and curtailed. Personal struggles were many, successes few. From classroom to common room the educational transformation so many sought was slow in coming, and when it did was often not in a politically progressive direction. Marxist educators for their part evinced a less than sensitive understanding of the specificities of racial and sexual

oppression, subtending them to dominant ideology, or false consciousness, or overdetermination, depending on their marxist tendency. And there were plenty on offer, including Groucho's.

## The posties always knock twice: Poststructuralism and postmodernism

Out, out, brief candle...

(Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, V, v 23)

The nineteen eighties were a far from peaceful decade. Hostages were, eventually, released from Teheran; body bags from Beirut contained US marines; Cuban troops were captured defending Grenada against US invasion while in the South Atlantic the legacy of imperialism was given one last pathetic cheer. And at the globe's northern end the Exxon Valdez spilled its oily guts. Not even a major dip in stocks on Wall Street could stem the rise of authoritarian populism and economic libertarianism. In the offices of power Milton Friedman and Friedrich von Hayek were the unacknowledged legislators of the world. Given this ongoing turbulence it is not altogether surprising that scepticism regarding the viability of structuralist accounts of society increased. They were accompanied by a fascination with electronic globalism and its alleged power to undermine narratives of orthodoxy. Intellectual pessimism and political disintegration became dominant characteristics of the period, poststructuralism and postmodernism its intellectual shorthand, culture its emerging terrain.

Although poststructuralism and postmodernism have often been conceived as mutually interdependent, they can be distinguished in terms of their focus on semiotics and society respectively. Drawing on the work of Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Paul de Man and Michel Foucault, poststructuralists have developed an approach to language and meaning whereby the signifier is divided from the signified. Meaning then can be found in both what a sign is and what it is not. This view suggests meaning is dispersed along a range of signifiers and that a previously assumed stability in meaning was false (Eagleton, 1983: 128-9). Yet the danger here, as Rachel Sharp pointed out many years ago, is that detaching the study of signs from any extra linguistic reality diminishes the crucial role of context for meaning. Sharp notes there is a tendency to reduce the social to nothing but the semiotic (Sharp, 1980: 99). And, as Eagleton also notes,

poststructuralism was a product of that blend of euphoria and disillusionment, liberation and dissipation, carnival and catastrophe, which was 1968. Unable to break the structures of state power, poststructuralism found it possible instead to subvert the structures of language (1983: 142).

Postmodernism, by contrast, can be seen as an epochal shift, or break, from modernity involving the emergence of a new social totality with its own organising principles. Jean Baudrillard and Jean Francois Lyotard both point to a movement towards a post-industrial age. New forms of technology and information are central to what they see as a shift from a productive to a reproductive social order. This is one where simulations and models increasingly constitute the world, erasing the difference between appearance and the real. What are conceived as grand historical narratives of social progress or, in marxist terms, the attainment of a classless society, are replaced by a concern with the ephemeral, fleeting and contingent nature of the present. Playful deconstruction of these grand narratives has now become the norm of social analysis (Featherstone, 1991: 3-9).

Even on this quite summative account it will be quite clear that the emergence of these 'posties' offers little joy to marxists. This is not to say that political battle at the level of theory has been avoided. Jurgen Habermas provides a powerful defence of communicative rationality in *Philosophical Discourses of Modernity* (1987), while Peter Dews points to *The Logics of Disintegration* (1989), and Alex Callinicos offers a sharp polemic *Against Postmodernism* (1989).

From the standpoint of Kantian rationalism, the one tune devotee of deconstruction and Derrida, Christopher Norris has published *What's Wrong With Postmodernism* (1990) and *The Truth About Postmodernism* (1993) - both sharply pointed dissents from the new pessimism.

The emergence of postmodernism and poststructuralism as dominant discourses has had the noticeable effect of diminishing the impact of marxist and radical critiques of education. Indeed 'radical' once - as in Bowles and Gintis, for example - synonymous with going to the root of contradictions in capitalism is now often used synonymously with unfettered market relations. A view, it is mistakenly thought, held by Adam Smith. Yet if marxism is experiencing difficulty in controlling and articulating its language and politics, there are, albeit ambivalent, indications of a revival in left critique.

Utilising the work done by the Institute for Social Research at Frankfurt, which initiated a complex and continuing revision of classical marxism, Rex Gibson has neatly summarised its insights in *Critical Theory and Education* (1986). While his discussion foregrounds culture and desire, Gibson does not neglect the insidious ideology embedded in the revival of vocationalism. The demand that schools produce better, more skilled, disciplined and flexible workers attempts to conceal, behind neutral objective descriptions, the employers' perspective and interest. By drastically narrowing the range of knowledge available in a curriculum to only that with immediate job or work relevance a new form of social control is brought to bear on unemployed youth (Gibson, 1986: 152). Similarly, David Livingstone's collection, *Critical Pedagogy and Cultural Power* (1987) examines dominant cultural and ideological practices in terms of the continuing construction of class and gender relations in families, schools and the mass media.

More recently there have emerged instances of contra- signification within postmodernism, giving rise to the appellation 'resistance postmodernism'. Central to this is the idea that labour, not language, is the frame of intelligibility which determines the regime of signification and ensuing 'representations' of the real. Language, this view suggests, is articulated by the division of labour. Difference is not the effect of unending playfulness, but rather is a materialist praxis produced through class struggle. At least this is one of the central theses argued in Mas'ud Zavarzadeh and Donald Morton's biting polemic *Theory as Resistance* (1994). Focusing on politics and culture after poststructuralism, they lambaste the failure of postmodernism to establish or sustain any transgressive, subversive or socially emancipatory educational project. For Zavarzadeh and Morton this arises from postmodernism's failure to address the political effect of contesting discourses of culture, and the structures of power inscribed in them. Where knowledge is viewed as contestation the sites of such contestation - social class, gender, race and relations - come into view! The postmodern classroom, they suggest, substitutes pluralism for conflict (Zavarzadeh and Morton, 1994: 41-2; see Mackie, 1994). Nor is *Theory as Resistance* the only text interrogating the pandemic of 'texts'. Some have found in the recent writing of Paulo Freire evidence of sympathy for resistance postmodernism. However, it remains an open question whether Freire can be considered a postmodernist of any sort (Mackie, 1994a).

### The struggle carries on

One of the sharpest critiques of postmodernist posturings can be found in Francis Barker's *The Culture of Violence* (1993). He attacks its vapid aridity via the metaphor of Nietzsche's cattle whose lives postmodernism encourages us to emulate. Consider, Nietzsche says, the cattle as they pass you by: they do not know what is meant by yesterday or today, they leap about, eat, rest, digest, leap about again and so on from morn till night, and from day to day, fettered to the moment and its pleasure or displeasure, and are thus neither melancholy nor bored. For Barker this image of postmodernism offers us a world without history, only an eternal and uncritical presence (Barker, 1993: 93). Perceptive though this is, its tone is pessimistic, its prognosis bleak. Even though he is



only concerned with a self-styled 'spectropoetics' in Marx, Jacques Derrida has recently acknowledged that

at a time when a new world disorder is attempting to install its neo-capitalism and neo-liberalism, no disavowal has managed to rid itself of all of Marx's ghosts (1994: 37).

Moreover, 'it will always be a fault not to read and reread and discuss Marx' (Ibid: 13).

While capitalism may consider itself the greatest show on earth, the prospects of a truly egalitarian post-capitalist order will only be enhanced by criticism of current inequities, contradictions and repressions. Within marxist and socialist traditions there are resources, particularly in the field of education, to combat capitalist serving agendas and policies. To build a new world on a critique of the old was, and remains, the principal political task.

In the most unlikely places models for this can be found. Central to the ultimate victory of the African National Congress over apartheid was the militant and uncompromising position taken by the South African Communist Party. That party's leader Joe Slovo led the military struggle against the armies of apartheid. Housing minister for only a brief time in the government of Nelson Mandela, Joe Slovo died in February this year. This essay is in honour of his memory and achievement.

## Notes

1. 'We gotta get out of this place', B. Mann and C. Well, EMI Music Publishing Pty Ltd.
2. 'This Wheel's on Fire', by Bob Dylan and R. Danko, Sony Music Pty Ltd.

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