

Marxism without dogma

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ABSTRACT

Among educators, the belief that class-based oppression ought to play a fundamental role in directing educational critique and pedagogical recommendations has accordingly eroded. Marxist analyses and pedagogies have been sharply criticised for neglecting the concerns of those vibrant social movements - in effect, concentrating upon issues of class to the exclusion of issues of race and gender. Assuming that the various segments of the left have much to learn from one another, and that we would be best served by greater unity in the face of a common adversary, I suggest that marxists ought to consider the ways in which marxism might be strengthened by incorporating the insights fuelling ongoing political movements. One step towards revitalising marxism is philosophical: abandoning the deism underlying orthodox marxism that continues to inform most marxist thought. With deistic assumptions abandoned, marxists can reconsider their historical assumptions and strategies for change with sensitivity to the ways in which issues of race, gender, and the environment shape the possibilities for an economically just society. Freed of the assumption that revolution serves students' interests, marxist educators can reconceive pedagogy with an eye toward multiple student positions.

Political and economic transformation of leading socialist countries, the weakening of worker-based social reform in capitalist countries, and the development of post-enlightenment philosophical perspectives in Europe have combined to place marxists on the defensive. Capitalists have declared the Cold War won, and among marxists, a once secure confidence in an immanent revolution is now replaced with the fear that marxism may be passé - that an agenda of economic equality is no longer viable. Among educators, the belief that class-based oppression ought to play a fundamental role in directing educational critique and pedagogical recommendations has accordingly eroded.

In such times, we must remember that the marxist tradition - despite its enormous influence - has always been troubled. Some of the most important theoretical accomplishments in marxism have been a direct response to adversity. Consider the Italian marxists' failure in the face of Mussolini's fascist movement and Antonio Gramsci's subsequent imprisonment. Gramsci (1971) completely rewrote the orthodox conceptions of base and superstructure in his effort to understand the momentary triumph of fascism. Gramsci's dedication to rethinking even the most sacred elements of marxist thought in an effort to understand contemporary historical developments stands as a model to be emulated in our own times. For marxism's viability as a guide to social change depends upon our ability to reconceive marxist categories to achieve, in Marx's words, the "self-clarification of the wishes and struggles of the age" (Marx, 1975: 209).



At present, marxism has been marginalised in the United States (and I must apologise for only being prepared to speak of the U.S.) by a conservative movement intended to reverse the few steps the society has made in the direction of social equality: welfare programs, affirmative action, federal medical care (Ed all, 1984; Edsall and Edsall, 1991). In the face of this onslaught, marxist visions have not had a secure place - even as a voice of resistance. The left is splintered among single-issue groups organised around specific political agendas. And the theory emanating from social movements and from universities suggests that there is no easy reconciliation of marxist concerns with the most vital social movements: feminist, anti-racist, ecological, and gay and lesbian efforts. Among educators, marxist analyses and pedagogies have been sharply criticised for neglecting the concerns of those vibrant social movements - in effect, concentrating upon issues of class to the exclusion of issues of race and gender.

Assuming that the various segments of the left have much to learn from one another, and that we would be best served by greater unity in the face of a common adversary, I suggest that marxists ought to consider the ways in which marxism might be strengthened by incorporating the insights fuelling ongoing political movements. Taking Gramsci as a model, I believe marxists should direct their efforts less towards preserving the creed of marxism and more towards a fruitful relation with ongoing political movements. Marxists should strive to create a vision of economic justice that finds resonance in the beliefs of large numbers of people - including many who presently define themselves as feminists or ecologists or opponents of discrimination.

One step towards revitalising marxism is philosophical: abandoning the deism underlying orthodox marxism and continuing to inform most marxist thought. As some post-modernist critics have suggested, the idea of an economy governed by laws with a built in historical progression leading to a free society, namely socialism, no longer deserves our commitment. This deistic vision pre-defines the proletariat as the agent of change and socialism as the solution to capitalist exploitation - making marxist analyses insensitive to real political and social concerns lying outside the marxist problematic (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). While Gramsci himself took important steps towards undermining this deistic faith, educational marxists continue to rely upon this implicit progression. The assumption that schooling for social change will necessarily be in the student's best interests belies a hidden deism which prevents marxist theory from being sensitive to a plethora of issues, including those of race and gender and sexual orientation - not to mention a host of strictly pedagogical concerns.

With deistic assumptions abandoned, marxists can reconsider their historical assumptions and strategies for change with sensitivity to the ways in which issues of race, gender, and the environment shape the possibilities for an economically just society. Freed of the assumption that revolution serves students' interests, marxist educators can reconceive pedagogy with an eye toward multiple student positions.

Deistic faith in Marx and marxist pedagogy

Before reconstructing marxism, it is worth our while to engage in what Nietzsche called "philosophy with a hammer": restrictive myths of marxism need to be identified and abandoned. Much contemporary philosophical discussion focuses upon the desirability of enlightenment assumptions (see, for example, Bernstein, 1991; Ross, 1988). Influential post-modernist thinkers have identified enlightenment conceptions of rationality as the myths most in need of abandonment, but I believe the most damaging enlightenment myth is the deistic vision suggesting that nature and society are designed in accordance with laws that need only be understood and obeyed to achieve a free society. It is the deistic faith that underlies the capitalist belief that individualistic striving is completely consistent with the good of the society (See, for example, Smith, 1977: 398). And it is the deistic faith that underlies the socialist belief that individuals will find their realisation in struggle

against capitalist society, the creation of a socialist society, and the formation of a new socialist human.

Because of the ambiguous legacy of deism - considered by some a profoundly religious doctrine while by others the principle of atheism itself (Mossner, 1967) - even an outspoken opponent of religion like Marx found little difficulty working with the assumption that the economy operated in accordance with laws, that those laws moved human history towards freedom. As innocuous as such assumptions sound - being the undergirding of much contemporary natural and social science - they are an expression of the enlightenment deism which posits a watchmaker God who creates a precisely engineered universe that operates in accordance with natural laws.

When Adam Smith "discovered" the laws of supply and demand, he was simultaneously engaged in science and the act of understanding God's design. Indeed, it was the deistic world view that made bourgeois economics possible. According to Smith,

The idea of a divine Being, whose benevolence and wisdom have, from all eternity, contrived and conducted the immense machine of the universe, so as at all times to produce the greatest possible quantity of happiness, is certainly of all the objects of human contemplation by far the most sublime (Smith, 1976: 236).

Smith's remarkable belief that the laws of supply and demand made for the smooth operation of the economy while simultaneously creating the most moral society - one serving the greatest good of the greatest number - was made possible by the deistic faith that economic laws were designed with human flourishing in mind.

When Marx appropriated bourgeois economics, he also adopted its deistic assumptions. While Marx parted company with Smith's theism (Marx, 1967b: 137) and with the idea that the laws of capitalism served the greatest good of the greatest number, he employed a neo-Hegelian version of deistic faith: capitalism was thought to be one stage of a historical process that necessarily led to a free society. Recall his claim to have proven the necessary development of socialist society in his letter to Joseph Weydemeyer:

Long before me bourgeois historians had described the historical development of this class struggle and bourgeois economists the economic anatomy of the classes. What I did was to prove: 1) that the *existence of classes* is only bound up with *particular historical phases in the development of production*, 2) that the class struggle necessarily leads to the *dictatorship of the proletariat*, 3) that this dictatorship itself only constitutes the transition to the *abolition of all classes* and to a *classless society*. (emphases in original, Marx, 1978c: 220)

The vision of necessary historical progression underlying Marx's view of his relation to bourgeois economics is explicitly articulated in the 'Preface' to the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. Here Marx's outlines a conception of history in which each epoch prepares the way for the next stage of development:

No social order ever perishes before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have developed; and new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society itself. Therefore mankind always sets itself only such tasks as it can solve; since, looking at the matter more closely, it will always be found that the task itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution already exists or at least are in the process of transformation. In broad outlines Asiatic, ancient, feudal, and modern bourgeois modes of production can be designated as progressive epochs in the economic formation of society. The bourgeois relations of production are the last antagonistic form of the social process of production ... ; at the same time the productive forces developing in the womb of bourgeois society create the material conditions for the solution of that antagonism (Marx, 1978b: 4).

The means of production required to overcome scarcity are only developed within capitalism (Marx & Engels, 1970: 49-50). The emancipatory power of large scale industry comes increasingly into conflict with the relations of production; given a legal system founded on private property, the



enormous wealth created under capitalism is funnelled to a few at the expense of the many. Marx's prophecy of a socialist society relies upon this neo-Hegelian version of deism where the laws of capital prepare the way for a socialist society.

Marx's belief in the necessity of socialism is dependent upon his vision of economic law articulated in *Capital*, where he shows that capitalism necessarily moves towards the immiseration of the proletariat and a falling rate of profit - which together will usher in a socialist revolution as economic collapse is combined with a militant workers' movement. Where Smith believes the market reconciles the interests of buyer and seller, employer and worker, Marx argues that the buying and employing of labour pits capitalist against worker. Since labour is the source of all wealth, capitalists make a profit based upon the surplus labour they extract from workers, that is the value workers produce beyond the value needed to keep them alive (Marx, 1967a: 177-185). Capitalists are able to accumulate profits to the degree that they pay workers less than the market value of the product. As machines (which do not create wealth) become a greater and greater part of the production process, capitalists must exploit workers ever more thoroughly to maintain their profit margin (Marx, 1967a: 199-230). Thus, technological advance brings both a continual tendency for the rate of profit to fall and the ever-intensified impoverishment of workers. Labourers - thanks to large scale manufacturing - are brought together in large numbers (1967a: 322-335), eventually develop class consciousness, and turn against the structurally crippled system (Marx, 1978d: 218).

This deistic picture of historical development leading towards a free society has a ghostly presence in marxist pedagogical thought. Pedagogical recommendations occur within the parameters of the historical progression towards socialism. In Paulo Freire's work, which I will take to be an exemplar of marxist educational thought, the pedagogical aims focus upon the individual's self realisation through revolution; the conception of understanding guiding marxist pedagogy focuses upon aiding students in understanding the laws of historical development; and the methods of marxist pedagogy are intended to prepare the oppressed to build the new socialist society.

The aims of marxist pedagogy are shaped by the assumption that history has a clear progression. Just as Marx argues that, "the emancipation of the oppressed class thus implies necessarily the creation of a new society" (Marx, 1978d: 218), marxist pedagogy often suggests that students will be freed in and through the process of struggle to create socialism. Dialogic praxis, for Freire, becomes "the new *raison d'être* of the oppressed; and the revolution, which inaugurates the historical moment of this *raison d'être*, is not viable apart from their concomitant conscious involvement" (Freire, 1970: 53). In the process, of revolution, the oppressed overcome their dual consciousness - divided between the master's and their own views - to become new humans:

It is therefore essential that the oppressed wage the struggle to resolve the contradiction in which they are caught; and the contradiction will be resolved by the appearance of the new man: neither oppressor nor oppressed, but man in the process of liberation (Freire, 1970: 42).

Because revolution ends in the freeing of all humans, the individual can overcome the division in her soul, and the society can be made free - all in one stroke.

The conception of understanding guiding marxist pedagogy is likewise shaped by an implicit faith in the historical progression outlined by Marx. Given a belief in historical laws moving the society towards socialism, understanding and freedom are defined as a knowledge of those laws. In Engels' words,

Freedom does not consist in an imaginary independence from natural laws, but in the knowledge of these laws and in the possibility which is thus given of systematically making them work toward definite ends. This holds good in relation both to the laws of external nature and to those which govern the bodily and mental existence of men themselves (Engels, 1959: 144).

Similarly, Freire argues that each era is characterised by fundamental themes. To become active participants in shaping their lives instead of passive agents of institutional influences, students must be able to grasp the themes of their epoch:

Men play a crucial role in the fulfilment and in the superseding of the epochs. Whether or not men can perceive the epochal themes and above all, how they act upon the reality within which these themes are generated will largely determine their humanisation or dehumanisation, their affirmation as Subjects or their reduction as objects. For only as men grasp the themes can they intervene in reality instead of remaining mere onlookers (Freire, 1973: 5).

Freire's descriptions of the style of thinking which will best enable students to understand the themes of their epoch fits closely with traditional western conceptions of rational thought. Themes of scientific thought are apparent as Freire stresses the importance of causal explanations and empirical methods in arguing that critical understanding

is characterised by depth in the interpretation of problems; by the substitution of causal principles for magical explanations; by the testing of one's "findings" and by openness to revision; by the attempt to avoid distortion when perceiving problems and to avoid pre-conceived notions when analysing them ... (Freire, 1973:18).

The pedagogical methods Freire proposes to aid the oppressed in learning to think critically also rely upon deistic assumptions. An implicit faith in the historical progression outlined by Marx allows Freire to believe that purportedly open-ended pedagogical techniques, dialogue and praxis, will serve the advancement of revolution. Once they are critical, students will grasp the truths of their epoch and work to overcome capitalism. Just as Marx believed that his description of the laws of capital captured invariant characteristics of the capitalist economy, Freire believes that epochs are characterised by fundamental themes that can be objectively represented. He warns that in polarised political contexts, "there is a tendency for the themes and reality itself to be mythicised, establishing a climate of irrationality and sectarianism." To counter such falsities, he hopes that radicals will be brought to a "critical and dynamic view of the world" that "strives to unveil reality, unmask its mythicisation, and achieve full realisation of the human task: the permanent transformation of reality in favour of the liberation of men" (Freire, 1970: 92).

In short, Freire's pedagogy operates in dependence on the deistic assumptions of Marx's historical progression. Without the beliefs that there are laws of capitalism moving society to socialism, Freire's pedagogy would not have defensible pedagogical aims, a determinate conception of understanding, or a basis for expecting that dialogue will be liberating.

Abandoning deism

The deism articulated in Marx's conception of history and relied upon in Freire's pedagogy no longer deserves our commitment. Our present circumstances give us ample cause to abandon the myth of a historical progression leading to socialism, forcing us to reconceive our conception of history and the role education plays in an effort to create a more just society. From an economic perspective and from an educational perspective, the deistic version of marxism stands in violation of critical aspects of our experiences and many of our democratic commitments. The economic laws described in *Capital* have not predicted the characteristics of advanced capitalism. And the pedagogies intended to aid the process of revolution have been criticised for disciplining students in accordance with a vision of the ideal socialist participant.

Economically, the portrait of capitalism drawn in *Capital* is at odds with the impressive health of global capitalism and the growth of the middle class in many nations. The most significant development in capitalism has been its global expansion. Capitalists now have a powerful means both of finding labour markets where the terms for extracting surplus value are favourable and of countering worker insurgency: they move corporations to regions where workers have low monetary expectations and no history of worker mobilisation (Barnet and Mueller, 1974).

Tendencies for the rate of profit to fall can be preempted by finding workers who will accept less money or by using the threat of moving to gain concessions from current employees (Camoy, Shearer, and Rumberger, 1983: 85; Moore, 1987: 3). And as corporations locate in regions which are beginning to operate with a cash economy, new markets are created, and the future of capital looks that much brighter.

The success of global capitalism may be one indicator that there is something amiss in the portrait of economic laws provided in *Capital*. Marx's reasoning concerning the tendency for the rate of profit to fall is problematic. The basic contentions that all wealth is created by labour, that all profits come from robbing workers, and that management and machines create no profit - all seem a bit difficult to accept in an age of highly mechanised production. Many auto companies are using robotics at an increased rate and claiming record profits. Habermas has quite justifiably argued that Marx's conception of uniform labour is unable to predict the increase in productivity resulting from scientific research and its application to the production process, that technological sophistication has made a heavily mechanised production process profitable (Habermas, 1975: 56).

Within the most industrialised capitalist nations, Marx's portrait of a declining rate of profit combined with a society sharply polarised between a few rich capitalists and many impoverished workers has not been completely realised. Marx did not predict the growth of a relatively large middle class (perhaps one-third of the population), created partly by the remarkable numbers of state employees (Carnoy and Levin, 1985: 61). The unexpected emergence of the middle class has granted significant legitimacy to the capitalist vision that hard work will be rewarded with material wealth. Despite the obvious everyday existence of extreme poverty, U.S. citizens from a broad range of incomes profess significant allegiance to the dream of hard work and upward mobility (Hochschild, 1981; Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton, 1985). Indeed, class consciousness, in the United States, has declined to the extent that most people consider themselves 'middle class'. The hegemony of the middle class and the attractiveness of the life of consumption it represents plays a large role in maintaining the stability of the society.

If the economic laws described in *Capital* are at odds with the historical developments we have witnessed, a thorough-going commitment to theory-practice unity would suggest that our conceptions of the transition from capitalism to socialism ought to be rethought. Without the deistic vision Marx provided, marxist pedagogy - itself largely considered in terms of its role in aiding the transition to socialism - must itself be reconsidered. It should come as no surprise if contemporary philosophical movements opposed to grand theorising underlie the most powerful critiques of marxist conceptions of pedagogy, since the deistic world view underlying marxism certainly counts as grand theory. Post-structural philosophy, critical of universalistic theoretical models (Foucault, 1972), and post-modernist philosophy (Lyotard, 1984) -with its dismissals of metanarratives - provide perspectives researchers have employed to argue that marxist educators are bent on maintaining privilege, rather than challenging it. Working without the assurance that history is moving towards freedom and with the belief that language embodies existing power relations, the 'linguistic left' has quite justifiably criticised marxist discourse for consolidating the "subject position of the white, western, masculinist, heterosexual leftist." According to Amarpal Dhaliwal,

this subject appears as the knower and inventor of emancipation who emerges as the 'natural' leader of the oppressed. The heterosexual, white, masculinist, US leftist is posited as the normative referent given that these are the privileged, unmarked categories (ones that do not have to be accounted for, specified, or theorised) (Dhaliwal, 1993: 87).

Dhaliwal might attribute this privileging of the white male subject to the universalising characteristics of marxist thought or (enlightenment thought more generally) combined with the knowledge that it is white males who have most vigorously promoted socialist agendas. In my opinion, it is the implicit deism of marxism that most powerfully restricts socialist visions to revolution at the hands of the white, male subject. It is a particular subject that is envisioned when we assume that the student achieves realisation by critically understanding and acting upon the

laws driving capitalism to socialism. The student Freire envisions is aggressive, finding his realisation in struggle for freedom in public realm pursuits (Weiler, 1991: 453; Luke, 1992: 31-32). He strives to understand the historical forces shaping his world in a 'logical' not 'magical' manner, and he learns to develop and defend his views in the process of dialogue, the rules of which privilege male participants (Leach, 1992). In short, the attributes of the ideal Freireian student are taken from white male subjects.

Because post-structural educators expect universal descriptions of the student to be implicit representations of the white male student, they have protested the abstract character of marxist categories: the tendency to speak of 'oppression,' 'humanisation,' 'liberation,' and 'emancipation' as if these terms have the same meaning for all groups (Ellsworth, 1992: 91). Where Freire views critical thought as liberating, post-structuralists have viewed rationality as a set of norms which are used to control some while marginalising others (Walkerline, 1992: 18). The conceptions of rationality guiding critical pedagogy have been viewed as the styles of reasoning created by white males for public discourse - styles which have served to regulate participants and exclude others:

Rational argument has operated in ways that set up as its opposite an irrational Other, which has been understood historically as the province of women and other exotic Others. In schools, rational deliberation, reflection, and consideration of all viewpoints has become a vehicle for regulating conflict and the power to speak, for transforming "conflict into rational argument by means of universalised capacities for language and reason" (Ellsworth, 1992: 94)

Consequently, the white, male, middle-class teacher who aims to aid the 'oppressed' by inviting them into dialogue is, from post-structuralist perspectives, an agent of colonisation. The marxist teacher invites students to submit to the regulating rules of rationality, not acknowledging that a student of colour or a female student may not have a unity of interests with the teacher or with the idea of revolution (Weiler, 1991: 454).

Post-structural thinkers thus accuse marxists of an unthinking duplicity: a stated commitment to universal liberation combined with an unstated assumption that all students should realise the ideal of the Freireian student. Marxism is viewed as one more normalising discourse that operates to regulate the individual, to insure that she or he follows the norms set out by the local priesthood. As such, marxist pedagogy is viewed as one more expression of the most threatening trends of our era, the "dialectic of enlightenment," that is, the "increasingly centralised and exclusive process of domination - political and personal - that constitutes the heart of western civilisation, and that in the 20th century has taken the infernal shapes of Nazism and Stalinism" (Omi and Winant, 1993: 132).

Maintaining the Marxist commitment to economic justice

By itself, "philosophy with a hammer" offers little positive ethical or political guidance. Locating the blinding role of deistic assumptions or disclosing the ways in which marxist discourse consolidates the "subject position of the white, western, masculinist, heterosexual leftist" are critical steps towards a revitalised left. But, such insights are merely the deconstructive stage, needing to be followed by reconstruction: marxists need to articulate a vision of economic justice that builds upon the understandings of these deconstructive critiques.

Of course, the focus upon economic justice itself must be defended. Here, I think the marxist tradition provides sound guidance, for despite culture, gender, or class, humans are united in their need for food, shelter, and the opportunity to develop their distinctive capacities. Perhaps the most basic ethical principle directing the marxist tradition has been the will to eliminate poverty, to insure that all people's basic needs are met. One finds this commitment in Marx's famous principle of distribution: "from each according to ability, to each according to need." One also finds this commitment in the marxist theory of history, which above all, promises an end to scarcity and offers the possibility of "associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature,

bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of Nature" (Marx, 1978a: 441). Without assuming that we are able to reach this vision at present, it is nonetheless a goal to strive for, since it focuses upon supplying the basics for all humans in the belief that "the development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom ... can blossom forth only with the realm of necessity as its base" (Marx, 1978a: 441).

As a central guiding political agenda, I can find no better principle than this will to end poverty. Of course, the reductionist character of this socialist agenda runs contrary to the deconstructive and descriptive tendencies of much contemporary theory. But, deconstructive approaches cannot, of themselves, supply direction for a political agenda. Ethical codes and political agendas inevitably simplify a complex reality to help us determine our most fundamental commitments. Political agendas are realised over decades and centuries, not over years, so there is a need for a stable rudder. But, the need for stable commitments is balanced by a need for continued criticism of our overarching agendas. Deconstruction and reconstruction are both necessary.

Omi and Winant's warning concerning marxist complicity in the dialectic of enlightenment is absolutely critical. Marxism has led to totalitarian governments and practices, and we need to understand why. Marxists need to take seriously the manifold critiques of socialism's insensitivity to difference; there is a clear need for more marxist study of identity formation, cultural integrity, freedom of speech, and democratic governance. Similarly, educational marxists need to reconsider issues of pedagogy, taking seriously the distinct cultural, economic, and gender positions of students to develop practices that are more inclusive than dialogue and praxis.

However, poverty continues to be a powerful source of oppression in the U.S., which is presently undergoing marked economic polarisation. Between 1977 and 1990, the wages of production workers declined while the salary of the average corporate executive increased 220 percent (Reich, 1992: 204). By 1990, the richest fifth of the U.S. population brought in over 50 percent of the nation's income, while the poorest fifth of the people received 3.7 percent of the nation's income (Reich, 1992: 197). 32.5 million U.S. citizens live in poverty (Reich, 1992: 203), and surveys report that from one-fifth to one-fourth of U.S. children are in poverty (Albelda et al., 1988). 16 million citizens are poor and working; millions are homeless.

The greatest current political threat in the U.S. is that the ongoing economic polarisation will be proceed unchecked due to the hegemonic power of middle-class individualism. The marketplace rewards economic selfishness and there is a powerful ideological exaltation of the rugged individual. As the sociologists Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton have argued, "everyday practices of work, school, and politics trained Americans to think and act in terms of individual competitive success" (1991: 60). Conservative politicians have seized upon the individualism of much of the populace in an effort to buttress the economic position of dominant groups. The tax system has been made far more regressive by trading upon an individualistic anti-government rhetoric, and welfare-state programs intended to buffer impoverishment and racial discrimination have faced prolonged attack (Albelda et al., 1988; Edsall, 1984; Edsall and Edsall, 1991).

Any leftist vision must counter this conservative hegemony, and the marxist emphasis upon economic justice does so more clearly than any other agenda. While the new social movements are, in my mind, strongest when they include a focus upon poverty, it is well acknowledged that new social movements run the risk of narrowing their focus to the concerns to relatively privileged people. As Dhaliwal, a defender of identity politics, notes,

the problem has been that the focus on identity has often ended up merely asserting the primacy of a certain notion of subjectivity and has emphasised individualistic 'lifestyle choices' at the expense of collective political strategy (1993: 83).

To the extent that leftist politics of any type becomes consumed with expanding lifestyle choices, to the degree that feminist and anti-racist movements are focused upon the professional development of the most secure women and minority group members, they have been coopted by

the middle-class hegemony of the larger society. The marxist commitment to meeting all humans' basic needs provides a much needed counter to the threat that leftist politics might be over-taken by middle class individualism.

Facing our dilemmas: Economic justice and the new social movements

With marxist deism abandoned, we are in a position to squarely face many of the problems dogging the marxist tradition. We do not know what 'freedom' means for a broad diversity of people, but we do know that it includes the means of subsistence. We have little reason to believe that capitalist societies inherently move towards socialism, but we do know that capitalism has always created exploitative working conditions as well as a large group of poor and unemployed. We know that a fairer distribution of wealth and more humane working conditions are possible. Even if there are many marxist claims that no longer deserve our commitment, there are critical aspects of the tradition that ought to be extended.

Marx's rationalist method is indispensable, because it focuses our attention not only upon current political movements but upon possible movements born of contradictions in the political economy. Ongoing social movements certainly do not exhaust the possible sources of resistance. Political opposition may appear first in politically unfocused acts, as in the subgroup activities described by Willis (1977). Theoretical attempts to highlight the sources of contradictions in contemporary capitalist economies can direct us to many of the sites of potential political movements. One of the basic contradictions emerging in global capitalist societies is the opposition between increasingly mobile capital and regionally based populations. Diverse groups - such as single-family farmers, industrial workers, and service personnel - may find that their economic circumstances are hurt as corporations exercise their freedom to use communities for a couple decades and leave. The structural opposition pitting mobile capital against relatively stable populations may be one of the most important sources of socialist organising in coming decades.

Marx's thought also provides a powerful example of a theory that explains how the wealth of one group is won at the expense of other groups. The theory of surplus value, provides one account of how capitalists rob workers, although it is problematic due to its dated conception of the role of machines in production and its other-worldly definition of value. There is a need for a new set of theoretical concepts which capture the ways in which some groups are parasitic upon other groups in society. It takes little observation of contemporary capitalist economies to note that the low wages of some people subsidise the lifestyles of other groups: many of the goods associated with the good life of the middle class - foods, clothes, and electronics, for example - are commonly manufactured by low-paid workers. Service industries depend upon under-paid people, working for middle-class managers and owners, waiting upon middle-class people. We need a replacement for the labour theory of value which discloses ways in which basic economic processes of production and consumption operate to the systematic advantage of some groups at the expense of other groups. Such an account could provide a more defensible understanding of which groups have interests in keeping with the status quo than the division between bourgeoisie and proletariat.

Within marxist pedagogy, Freire's insistence upon having a pedagogy articulated with a conception of liberation should be maintained, although we need to reconceive the relation of politics and pedagogy. Where Freire too-easily assumes a natural harmony between educational and political agendas, we can recognise that even a social justice agenda and pedagogy might - in advanced capitalist settings - serve as an exclusionary approach that preserves the privilege of white middle-class males. Marxist pedagogies will need to be sensitive to diverse students - a task requiring that guiding conceptions of understanding and educational methods are scrutinised for their potential biases. And marxist educators need to be prepared to reconceive their political visions based upon the commitments we find in our students.

In reconstructing marxism, the insights supplied by contemporary social movements will prove indispensable. Thanks to the development of the ecological movement, we are now in a position to realise that the socialist vision will require a thorough-going reconsideration of humans' relationship to nature - something the marxist tradition is unable to provide. Marx believed that capitalism would provide the means of production needed to end scarcity. Yet, ecologists' portraits of our global circumstance - gross levels of consumption in the most industrialised nations, population increases and low levels of crop production in many countries - problematise any portrait of material abundance (Ehrenreich, 1993). Portraits of socialism inevitably raise problems of distribution of wealth that cannot be answered solely by considering the relative wealth and poverty among humans. Considerations of sustainable subsistence for all people must become part of the picture.

Similarly, anti-racist and feminist movements have articulated many of the shortcomings of marxist thought. The debate in the U.S. over the possibility of eradicating racism via universal social democratic policies has, to my mind, demonstrated the need for race-specific policies. Institutionalised racism in the U.S. is maintained partly through economic exploitation, but also by housing and job segregation (Massey and Denton, 1993). Traditional socialist programs, like guaranteed jobs, would be insufficient to open opportunities for African Americans, Latinos/as, or American Indians in the primary job market, since dominant group members have long worked to reserve the best jobs for people of their own ethnicity (Granovetter, 1995: 171, 173). A democratic form of socialism will thus require means of countering ingrained patterns of discrimination.

Socialist visions will also need to address the division of work between the public and private realms. Feminists have argued that socialist agendas and socialist pedagogies have been developed with a focus upon alienation and poverty in the public realm - leaving the patriarchal relations of the home unconsidered (Pateman, 1988; Luke: 31-2). Socialist feminists have demonstrated ways in which capitalists and workers cooperated to relegate women to unpaid positions in the home (Hartmann, 1981). Women continue to face both discrimination in the workplace and patriarchal male expectations insisting that women take primary responsibility for domestic tasks (Gaskell, 1992: 76-88). In the U.S. at present, women and their children are the most impoverished groups (Albelda et al., 1988: 41-54). Any vision of economic liberation that does not address both the economic discrimination women face in the workforce and childcare needs will be doomed to replicate patriarchal structures.

There is no inherent tension between new social movements and a non-theological version of marxism. Indeed, the new social movements and marxism would be strengthened through combination. Insofar as socialism is a real and democratic alternative, it needs the insights developed by anti-racism activists, feminists, ecologists, and gay and lesbian activists. In constructing an ethic and political agenda, we will need to encapsulate the rationality built into potential and ongoing social movements - regardless of whether the movements fit neatly into the historical progression outlined by Marx.¹

Note

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