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#### **BOOK REVIEWS / RESENHAS**

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#### **Red Chalk: On Schooling, Capitalism and Politics**

**by Mike Cole, Dave Hill and Glenn Rikowski**

**in discussion with Peter McLaren.**

***Brighton (East Sussex, UK): the Institute for Education Policy Studies, 2001, 83 pages***

a review by Marcelo Guimarães Lima

This small book is a lively, engaging and intelligent work. It demonstrates that, in a time of planned and administered obscurantism, of material and moral enslavement of individuals and social groups to the "religion" of the Money-God and the "worship" of the "sacred forces" of the marketplace, the enormous obstacles in the path of human solidarity and social justice produced by present day "globalized capitalism", can also encourage a redoubling of efforts from the part of those who refuse to sacrifice their integrity, who refuse to give up their humanity, and to conform to the present global social (dis)order.

The violence of present day social relations, founded on the separation of humanity, among and within nations, into two groups: one destined to profit exclusively from the work and sacrifice of the other, and to profit also from the destitution of the majority, implicates all of us in the workings of the system of universalization of commodified human relations, that signals the specificity of our historical context. In such a context, we are confronted daily by a form of "founding" social violence that negates the "human condition" of a vast number of people around the world, not only in relation to their most basic material needs, but also in terms of the practical negation of associated basic rights of human self-determination and the right to live in peace and with a "modicum" of dignity.

What Brazilian sociologist Florestan Fernandes once called "the process of the dehumanizing of man by man" imposes itself to the majority today as a sort of "natural catastrophe" affecting, without exception, all of our spheres of existence and social practices. In this long night of suffering and submission, we are told: "All resistance is futile!" Against our will and our judgement, it imposes itself, unescapable and uncontrollable. As an all embracing reality, the present situation appears to leave no room for alternatives.

Facing the interpellation (turned "inquisition") by modern (or rather, post-modern) day ideologies of triumphant capitalism announcing the "end of history", the authors of the present book, like modern day Galileos collectively respond: "And yet, it moves!". Hesitant and/or confident, tentative or decided, fast or slow, in the open or underground, exposed or dissimulated, history moves! As night moves and passes, even the darkest night reflects its own sort of clarity. And not only the authors state the present movement of history in the making: like the restless ancient Greek philosopher, they demonstrate movement by walking!

Composed by interviews, conducted by Peter McLaren, with British educational writers and activists Mike Cole, David Hill and Glenn Rikowski, the **Red Chalk** is a luminous piece of writing on the social-political groundings of Education today, aiming at clarifying the relationships between the universal educational malaise and the structural transformations of capitalism. There are three main and related aspects of this book that define its relevance, considering also the fact that it represents, in the form of interviews, a general introduction to the authors' views, elaborated and exposed in numerous articles and books. The interview format, we must say, allows for reading the interrelations between activism and writing, political experience and theory, the exchanges between personal, public and textual interventions and also the exchanges of roles between the interviewer and those who are being interviewed.

The first main aspect here is the reflected wealth of different positions of each writer, within the broader framework of a Marxist Theory of Education in progress. The second is the grounding of such a theory in the proper foundations of what we may call, following Marx, a "political reading" of underlying "economic" realities ( **Capital** as the "critique of Political Economy"), a non-reductionist (that goes without saying) grounding of theory in the structural determinants of capitalism vital processes, that is in the "basic" and larger foundations of Marxism as a theory of society and of history.

It goes without saying also, that such a move, contrary to the fashionable and tiresome recent and not so recent "critiques", "overcoming", and "funeral songs" of Marxism, proves that the "renovation" of Marxism need not to be a type of disfiguration and neutering of Marxist theory, a retreat from the "theoretical class struggle" (so to speak), but may instead be seen as a "structural determinant" of Marxist theory itself, an internal, dialectical and vital dimension of critical materialism. The "identity" of Marxism, understood as the theory of socialism, is, in a sense, dialectically grounded in the future, not in the past: not the "eternal return", but the "eternal"becoming.

And this particular development of a Marxist theory of Education in the making shows, equally, and this is my third point, that the development of theory does not occur in "thin air", nor is the sole consequence of the critic's good intentions, good will and good actions, no matter how "noble" or "tragic", but can only occur within "given" conditions, that is, as a process of exchanges between "experience" and "reflection". An obvious point? And yet, one easily overlooked, and not by chance, in a time of heteronomy and fragmentation of the anticapitalist forces. As a dialectical product of a specific British context and historical experience in the educational front, the **Red Chalk** invites us to examine the convergences and as well as the dissimilarities between it and our context(s), as a necessary step for the productive dialogue and exchanges between actors in the universal struggle for equality and justice, here and now. The strength and the universal significance of the **Red Chalk** collective can only be the result of its embedding in the "movement of reality itself". And we can say here that theoretical mediation is a long, difficult, delicate, elusive and thankless job. And yet, most probably, the "only" essential one.

As an example of the creative developments of "Marxist educational theory" we can point out Glenn Rikowski's focus on the social production of labor-power as one of the keys to understand the role of education today: " Education and training, as I have argued many times, are implicated in the social production of labor-power. They are elements entering into, therefore, the generation of 'socially average labour-power' that constitutes socially necessary labour-time and hence value itself , as well as the equalization of commodities through exchange-value. Education and training in capitalist society are that crucial." (P62) Dave Hill's critique of "culturalist neo- Marxists" stresses the embedding of the educational struggle within the larger context of political struggle against the powers of capital: "it is not enough just to work within, with education. The struggle is wider; the role has to be wider, and coordinated, organized. But not just that. There needs to be vision plus strategy- of identifying and working with social forces." (P.56) No doubt a reasonable proposition, one would say, in the spirit of a truly Marxist approach. And yet, one systematically ignored in much of the debates, specially, for instance, in North America, around the issues of critical pedagogy and social change!

As Peter McLaren writes in the introduction:"Schooling is very much an abstract form of estrangement that has real, concrete effects on the lives of working people." We could say that educational theory, when divorced from the knowledge of the real experiences of class oppression, is also "an abstract form of estrangement" with no real effects against the structures of oppression. Using the **Red Chalk** we can start to cross out these an other forms of political alienation and hopefully start building the solidary actions and the clear knowledge we need, inside and outside the school.

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