



Pessimism of the Intellect & Optimism of the Will

Interview with prof. Dave Hill and dr. Leena Robertson

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Between April 19-21, 2017 professor Dave Hill and dr. Leena Robertson (Middlesex University London) gave three lectures at the University of Lower Silesia. Prof. Dave Hill presented a Marxist critique of neoliberalism with a special focus to education policies and we discussed his proposal: **a socialist manifesto for education**. Dr. Leena Robertson gave a presentation on “Education and Rights of Linguistic Minorities in Europe” and we learned in-depth about her **Erasmus+ funded project “ROM-tels”** which involves People to People Foundation in Romania and four collaborating universities: Newcastle University, (UK), University of Montpellier (France), Helsinki University (Finland) and Middlesex University (UK). Both lectures were streamed on Facebook: Dave Hill on **“Critical Education”** and Leena Robertson on **“Education and Rights of Linguistic Minorities in Europe”** and we had the unique and honorific opportunity to make an interview with Dave and Leena. The discussion was recorded on 22 April, 2017 in Wrocław, Poland.

A New Audacity: I think there is a certain political deadlock in the current historical bloc, which I would like to characterise with two pessimistic quotes. One is often repeated by leftist scholars, that today it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. The other one would be the Thatcherite nonsense, that “there is no alternative”. Is it our final deadlock in hopelessness?

Dave Hill: I would refer to Gramsci and the war of position and the war of manoeuvre. The question you just posed about the hegemonic position of pro-capitalist ideology, the

belief that “there is no alternative” (TINA) is always being contested. In class society, it always is, to a greater or lesser extent. That’s the war of position where we fight for a counter-hegemonic ideology, understanding, consciousness. As Ira Shor has called it, there are permanent *culture wars*, battles to transform the consciousness of the people.

That ideological struggle can take place in many sites of course. That can take place in formal educational settings, where teachers, teacher educators and university teachers can have an impact; and it can take place in non-formal education settings, such as discussions in the pub, in the trade union, in the workplace – talking, walking along the corridor and contesting racist, sexist, homophobic and neoliberal comments. So, the contestation can take place in formal education and takes place in non-formal education as well.

But of course, we don’t just learn by words, we also learn by action, there’s a lot written about the involvement of the body and why “getting involved” for example with a thousand others or only five others in some forms of solidaristic action, where it involves kinetic action, bodily action – whether that be marching, singing, raising fists, raising flags, running away from the tear gas together. Acts of physical solidarity, emotional solidarity, social solidarity are huge learning experiences. We learn in formal and non-formal educational sites, different arenas of life. And I think again Gramsci was very powerful in his writing about this. We are engaged in permanent culture wars.

Is it easier to imagine the end of world than the end of capitalism? For many, that is so. But for fewer and fewer! Current developments in neoliberal capitalism that is to say austerity, is causing what Marx called *immiseration*. And we are actually seeing not just *relative immiseration*, we are seeing *absolute immiseration*, absolute impoverishment, absolute pauperisation – a return, for many, to Victorian times, living conditions, hunger, homelessness typical of the late nineteenth century, when Engels, Dickens and Jack London were writing about poverty in Manchester and in London. One of my recent books is about **Immiseration Capitalism**, as are a number of **my recent articles**. The impoverishment of many in the working class is deeply shocking.

When we do see it, this huge growth of inequality, when it is so obvious to so many people – the immiseration, and the social, social psychological and individual psychological harm that it is causing – early deaths, suicide, self-harm, despair (brilliantly captured in Ken Loach’s film “**I Daniel Blake**”) – then some people are more motivated to resist. They see through ideology, which is already a contested terrain in each individual’s mind. There is a nice phrase that *there comes a time when the material conditions of people’s existence leads them to tear open the curtains*, to throw off the glasses which are the rose tinted neoliberal glasses, to see that the Emperor of Neoliberalism has no clothes.

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Neoliberalism promises trickle-down economics – wealth trickling down from the wealthiest to the rest – but it’s more like ordure pouring down on heads of workers (by which I mean both so-called working class and so-called middle class – all of us who sell our labour power.) Neoliberalism and its prophets promise a more efficient, effective, prosperous life for all who work hard, a meritocracy. But it doesn’t. The material conditions of peoples’ existence show that it is not the case.

I've been giving speeches on socialism, capitalism and Marxism for fifty years now and I made a speech in Occupy London, Tent City, in 2009, and I said to the crowd: "I've been making speeches for fifty years, but it's been like pissing in the wind and there has always been a blow back." Then I ended the speech by saying that "But you know what! The wind direction has changed!" So now, ever since 2008, there is a widespread change in consciousness. Encapsulated in the phrases, and the banners and the newspaper items: "we are the 99%", "99% against 1%". This massive change in consciousness has led to mass mobilisation, to Direct Action. We are seeing many millions throughout the world going on protest marches and demonstrations. Two types of marches: there are particular single issue protests, such as the Women's March after Trump's election in the United States, and such as the successful anti-abortion rallies and demonstrations in Poland in 2017 – single issue marches. Then there are marches based on larger economic issues, such as anti-austerity protests, strikes, demonstrations, for example in Britain and in Greece and Portugal and the Arab world. These encompass a "United Front" – to use the Trotskyist phrase -, they bring in not just Marxist revolutionaries, but radical feminists, radical anti-racists and decent, very decent social democrats.

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So I think the quote you made was maybe true until 2008, but with the economic crisis, the material and the psychological impact, the social devastation, what in Greece is called the social genocide, I think that's no longer true. There are two types of action as a response to neoliberal austerity capitalism – the first is Direct Action, the second is party political action, for example in the electoral arena. Of course, sometimes they combine.

A. N. A.: What do you think about the example of Greece as a response to unregulated neoliberal austerity capitalism?

D. H.: Greece has been the most recent extreme example of post-2008 neoliberal oppression- just as Chile was the test pad for neoliberalism in 1979, the overthrow of the democratically elected socialist government of Salvador Allende and its replacement by the terrible cruel, murderous dictatorship of Pinochet and, in economic policy, the naked early form of neoliberalism, carried out by "The Chicago Boys", driving down wages, salaries, benefits, hugely widening social inequalities. Well, the current testing ground to see just how much the capitalist class can screw down the rights, entitlements, salaries, welfare benefits, living standards of the mass of the people, the test pad in the last 8 years has been Greece and it has been almost like a genocide. Greece used to have the lowest suicide rates in Europe, now it's got one of the highest, such has been the attack on salaries, benefits, pensions.

I mentioned Direct Action, in the streets, in the occupations, extra-parliamentary action. And I mentioned also parliamentarist, electoral, party political action. But left social democrat governments, even where they have a Marxist rhetoric, collapse, retreat, surrender, in the face of capitalist onslaught – for example by the International Monetary Fund, the European Central Bank, the European Commission. So, in Greece, for example, Alexis Tsipras, leader of Syriza, who won the anti-austerity referendum July 2015, then proceeded to implement the very austerity he had campaigned against. He capitulated, betrayed, the left-wing anti-austerity mandate under which he was elected and which was reinforced by the referendum result. He ignored the anti-austerity vote. And the numerous general strikes, occupations, protest, which he could – and should –

have worked with to refuse to accept the austerity measures – he could have – with widespread street and activist support, confronted Capital.

Internationally Tsipras' capitulation to "The Troika", to "The Institutions", was a huge defeat for the Marxist left, those who had put some faith in the parliamentarist process, anyhow, and the Left in general. In the years 2009-2015 there was a huge hope throughout the left, throughout the world of socialist activists, theoretical Marxists and radical leftists about Syriza. There was Direct Action support for Tsipras going along the revolutionary road, confronting national and international Capital, but Tsipras ignored that. I was a frequent visitor and participant in demonstrations in Athens in those years 2009-2015, on demonstrations and protests, being teargassed on two occasions on demonstrations in Syntagma Square. As a Marxist, as a Trotskyist, I had no illusions in parliamentarist social democracy, and called at the time for support for extra-parliamentary action and for the Marxist coalition, [Antarsya](#), of which I am a member. As I still do.

"It is a lesson throughout history, of whenever there is a crisis, social democrats cave in. They seek to manage capitalism rather than to replace it."

I think that that the crumbling of social democrat resistance in the face of capitalist onslaught in Greece was a lesson. It is a lesson throughout history, of whenever there is a crisis, social democrats cave in. They seek to manage capitalism rather than to replace it. The tragedy for Greece was that for a period of time, in 2012, the country was in a [pre-revolutionary situation](#) characterised by working class consciousness developing in leaps and bounds – mass radicalisation. Trotsky wrote about this process of mass radicalisation in his ["What is a Revolutionary Situation"](#). But in Greece there was no party organised and implanted well enough to lead to a break with capitalism as there had, in contrast, been in Russia in 1917. It was the closest Europe had got to a socialist replacement of capitalism, an anti-capitalist revolution, since the Portuguese Revolution of April 1974. Kevin Ovenden and Helena Sheehan have both published Marxist books on these events, respectively ["Syriza: Inside the Labyrinth"](#), and ["The Syriza Wave: Surging and Crashing with the Greek Left"](#).

So, when, currently in Britain, virtually all of the socialist and Marxist and anti-capitalist Left is supporting Jeremy Corbyn and his left social democratic programme, it is "without illusions" – if Jeremy Corbyn in England actually succeeds in becoming Prime Minister... I don't underestimate the destabilisation that national and international organs of capital and their military and security apparatuses will seek to destroy any left government, as they have done repeatedly over the last century See Seamus Milne's ["A Very British Coup"](#) for how the British ruling class could destabilise and overthrow a socialist, or a left-social democrat government in England. But, to get back to your metaphor, your metaphor about disillusionment... in general I think we are much closer than we were before the 2008 Crash to a new imaginary, to a new consciousness and a new Resistance, to not only imagining, but to organising for a better- in my view, a socialist, future.

Leena Robertson: I also don't think that it is true that we have not been able to imagine a better future, and a better future for all. Young children, for example, are capable of showing that it is possible. You can hear alternative visions in their questions and see it in their actions. Often when I am in public spaces, such as children's playgrounds or parks with my grandchildren, I think about this. If there are limited numbers of swings available for children, for instance, it is interesting to observe what they do when everyone wants to have a go.

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A vast majority of children might try to have a bit longer go than someone else, or try to reserve it for their own friend, but they will surprisingly soon stop and let others have a go, too. It is equally interesting to watch what children’s parents do. You hear time and time again parents tell their children that you must share, you must take turns, it’s not fair if others do not get to go on the swing. In public spaces parents do not teach their own children selfish individualistic behavior, typical of neoliberalism of that they can play on the swings for 99 days, and allow others to use it only for the 100th day. No, because that would go against people’s ideas of bringing up children to be sharing, co-operative beings, people.

I think young children tend to think that fairness is nicer, fairness is their preferred way of being, and of course there are moments, when they strive to get the swing a bit more than somebody else, but on the whole I think young children have already imagined a better future, and often practice a better today. And maybe that’s part of the solution which for me would be within early education, where you work with children and consistently with democratic aims, aiming for fairness, aiming for democracy, aiming to change, aiming to involve young children in the struggle. It’s a way forward I think and I hope, that the next generation will be able to achieve it.

A. N. A.: Do you think we already have the conditions for a transformation?

L. R.: Well, we already have those spaces, where you can start a mini-revolution, there are spaces where you can work towards a better future, towards democracy, towards more democratically appropriate practices. That is what a group of teachers and I have been working towards, an international project ([ROMtels](#)), finding those spaces in Estonia, in Finland, in the USA, and in England, where constraints around teachers are very different, but real constraints nevertheless. In order to do something different is of course challenging, either because of the local context prevents you from doing it or because the local, or national policies are so regimented and tightly controlled. It’s not easy, but teachers can make a difference and I think it is something about not doing it on your own, it is about uniting with other, with other people, with allies, forces and doing it together.

“While maintaining what you have to do for certain policy demands, under the surface, you start the *silent riot*.”

One school talked to me about the “*silent riot*”, that they, under the radar of OFSTED (the national education Inspectorate in England) and the inspection regime, while maintaining what you have to do for certain policy demands, under the surface, you start the *silent riot*. You do it silently, you try to subvert, but you can’t do it on your own. So the very shared beliefs and values, like what they want to change, and why they want to change this week and day, and whether that might be next month, constantly trying to subvert the agenda of OFSTED for example. They demonstrate really, really high results, but they won’t talk to the Inspectors about what has happened, about their alternative, for example democratic and critical practices, that they have developed, partly perhaps in order to get those high results, partly for the intrinsic and civic and social value of democratic, participative, critical practice. Then, when the Inspectors have gone, after you have shown the Inspectors the high results that you are achieving, then they – teachers, assistant teachers, parents, helpers, children – can say: yes and here is how we approached it and here is how we did it. It’s very sub-hidden and silent

when the Inspectors are there, with their formulaic and restrictive check-lists, their surveillance sheets.

D. H.: Any action is both individual and subjective as well as being social, so I think we do have to start – but not finish – with the classic feminist understanding, that the personal is political and in your personal relationships and what you do with people and the behavior you model has impact – think of exploitative behavior as well as cooperative solidaristic behavior – and I think that on a very small level most people can remember a teacher for example or an uncle or a granddad, somebody who made a difference, somebody who said actually this is the way things could be or should be, this is the way you could think of going. So I think we mustn't underestimate the importance of individual behavior and relationships.



L. R.: And it could've been an auntie too...

D. H.: Or a grandma! At a macro level then – I might not be a popular with the word I'm about to use – but it is a perfectly legitimate part of political discourse and theoretical analysis. I happen to be a Trotskyist, which in most of the world has *not* got the negative connotation as it has perhaps in Poland. What it means in much of the rest of the world is simply, in particular, Western Europe, is that I'm part of a non-Stalinist, non-authoritarian, non-dictatorial Marxist movement. Most Marxists in France, USA, Britain, would describe themselves as Trotskyists. As a Trotskyist, I will use another word, which in some countries, such as Finland or Poland, might be widely regarded as a swear word, I accept some aspects of Leninism. I will specify which three aspects precisely – the need for party, the need for organization and the need for programme. So these three things are where I differ from many other Marxists and certainly social democrats. I do criticise the behavior of many Trotskyist parties internationally, which have unfortunately mimicked the behavior of the Stalinist top-down controlled communist parties. I accept that and in fact I joined – I am not seeking to recruit members – Socialist Resistance in England, a Trotskyist party in the tradition of Ernest Mandel. The Fourth International that I've joined (I left Socialist Resistance and am now a member of the Greek Trotskyist political party, OKDE-Spartakos, part of the Antarsya Coalition) deliberately support minority viewpoints within the organization, and I think most Marxist groups now seek to embrace minority viewpoints- though to very varying degrees.

So I believe in the importance of party, but I also devote a lot of my life to non-sectarianism, to anti-sectarianism, to saying, well actually I could be wrong – we need auto-critique- and I work with Socialist Workers Party in Britain, with the Socialist Party for example and, currently in Britain, with the Left elements in the Labour Party. For example I am a member of the Momentum organization, a 20,000 strong socialist group of activists that currently straddles those within and not within the Labour Party.

There is an important contextual difference between different countries concerning tactics, concerning the relationship between Marxists and the prevailing social democratic party, such as Labour in England, Syriza in Greece, Jean-Luc Melenchon's France Insoumise in France, the HDP in Turkey. The contextual difference between Greece and Britain re-working with and inside, or, on the other hand, outside, social democratic parties is that in Greece there was not only a revolutionary tradition but also there were well-organised anti-capitalist forces, parties (as well as sections of the trade union movement and social movements) and movements. In contrast, Britain, currently there is not – as yet – hence the need to work, currently, in Britain, with the Labour Party, now that it is led by an anti-neoliberal Leftist. This is a tactical decision.

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To refer back to Lenin, I think you can heighten understanding, heighten class consciousness – I'm going to use another word which is a negative work for some people – I think we do need a *vanguard*, people who have actually got experience of what it is like to combat a police charge on horseback, or to organise a demonstration to stop a law or to stop Fascists, or to produce leaflets, social media, placards. You simply do need that, people with experience, and with developed political understanding, who can, from analysis and experience, have a good idea of “*what happens next*”.

The problem is with a vanguard that it sometimes become divorced from the membership. I realise that. Frequently vanguards and political leaderships suffer from two problems. One of the problems is the ego. The leaders of most tiny political Trotskyist Marxist revolutionary parties (and, of course, large parties! look at Donald Trump and Tony Blair, and Teresa May perhaps) somehow come to believe that they are god, somehow they come to believe that they alone have the answer, and that's a big problem.

The other problem is sectarianism, for example the ultra-sectarianism of many on the Far Left. And therefore is the inability to work with other forces. The centre of, the core of our class struggle, is the class. In terms of organisation, it is the Marxist, the Marxist organic intellectuals, to use a Gramscian term, who are *part of* the working class and not just preaching, not just telling, the working class from above or from a distance. So the core of our Resistance is the Marxist organic intellectuals. I need to add, that in Gramscian terms, organic intellectuals are not just Marxist professors and academics, teachers and journalists. It is the politically advanced layers in the trade unions, in social movements, single issue movements, in the workplace as well. Then, beyond the core, and within which the core works, there is the broad United Front movement, which I mentioned earlier- Marxists working with trade unions and trade unionists, or anti-Fascist/ anti-racist, feminist, social movement activists, engaged in struggles and campaigns important to the working class, over, for example, economic issues, housing issues, issues of reproductive rights. Their leaders and members might never have read anything about Marx, they might never read a left wing newspaper. But working in these United Front actions, these alliances, is hugely important – in action those broad

alliances populations rapidly become politicized. The best examples are the Paris Commune of 1871, that influenced Marx's writing and analysis so much (see his "[The Civil War in France](#)", the French Revolution and the Russian Revolution.)

"The pessimism of the intellect and the optimism of the will."

I'm going to quote a lovely quote from Gramsci about "*the pessimism of the intellect and the optimism of the will*". The defeat of Syriza (actually the capitulation of Syriza since 2015) and the defeat of the '68 revolution in France, can lead to a sense of defeatism. But that's where we need people who do have the pessimism of the intellect, the understanding that things are shit, and we were smashed. But on the other hand we have the optimism of the will that we can and must do something about it. The need for party, for an organization was shown in Tahrir Square and in various of the Arab Spring uprisings, where there was just one demand – get rid of the president, and that's not enough. The difference between those revolutions and the Russian revolution is that in Russia there was an organized party, a party with an experienced vanguard, a membership, an organisation and a programme that actually took power.

A. N. A.: How can we translate all of this to practical terms, I mean how do you understand transformative praxis?

L. R.: Well, you have three different types of people – people such as teachers, as well, of course, as political activists. You have the people, who conform, who reform and then the people who transform which is a really useful way of looking at it. "Transformation" is both such a brilliant term and such a problematic term, because it raises various questions. Who do you transform it for, and is it that you make the transformation yourself, or are you trying to involve others who transform. And then, to what extent, what count as, transformation for them, for their perspective. All that is deeply problematic.

Having seen many-many schools and places and Early Years settings in London, there has been some lovely wonderful work going on, where you feel that this school has really transformed its ethos and the way it operates on a daily basis. It's not just something that has been tagged on, but it has transformed everyday encounters, everyday pedagogy, everyday practice in an interesting level. And then your head teacher comes along, perhaps a new head teacher, or your governing body or someone else, and it seems like all of that gains, those developments can be wiped out so quickly. The success of a transformation is equally very difficult to prove if you look for proof. Except that these sorts of, for example, democratic, participative, individual and collective ways of behaving, organizing, teaching, learning, improvements that have been developed and implemented are places where people say that it has made a difference, it's a better place to be, it's a better place to teach.

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D. H.: And there is the role of memory. We have to have utopias, we have to have different visions of the future, different vision and versions of the present, but also different visions and versions of the past. There is historical memory, for example to refer to the current position of Jeremy Corbyn. Now he is no savior, but what – his left-wing social democratic vision and speeches and policy – resonates with, chimes with, historical memory. There is the historical memory of what the post-war Labour government of Clement Atlee did, in a previous era of austerity, after being elected in

1945. Instead of cutting wages, public services, welfare benefits, his government the Labour government after the war was a reformist government actually carrying out reforms – setting up the National Health Service, building a million homes- 80 percent of them what we in the UK call “council housing – socially subsidised cheap rented housing -, instituting free secondary schooling for all and nationalising large sectors of industry. Of course it was not perfect!

However, this resonates. During and after Jeremy Corbyn’s election as Leader of the Labour Party in 2015, within months 400,000 extra people had joined the Labour Party in Britain. You know, the first time we’ve got a socialist or, to be more precise in terms of political theory, a left social democrat.

So there are people like me and millions of people who were involved in the Great Miners’ Strike in Britain of 1984-5, people from trade unions, people who were involved in workers collectives supported by the last Leftish Labour government, in the mid-1970s. There are people who have experience and memory of a different past, a past where our interpretation, based on our own and our own communities’ and families’ and class experience of those events- the post-war Labour government, the 1970s strikes and Workers’ Control/ Workers’ Collectives/ Municipal and National Enterprise Boards, our experience and interpretation is different than that which is put over by the ideological state apparatuses, by the Mainstream Media. In Portugal for example, where there is a 12 million population, there was a time about 5 years ago, when 3 million people were on the streets demonstrating in mass solidaristic action. For some people it was the first time they’ve done it, but other people have memory, for example, in Portugal, memory of the 1974 revolution and the anti-Fascist struggle prior to that. In the university college workers strike in England of May 2016 we had young people for whom the capitalist press has almost successfully destroyed memory of what is a strike. We had picket lines, people with banners, so many young people, 19-20 year olds who were saying, “what is a picket line?” “We know what the word strike means, but what do we do?” They learned from those who had the historical (and actually, recent, too) memory and experience of organising picket lines and strike action- and they gained the experience and memory themselves.

So there is the learning from history, but without being shackled by the organizational forms necessarily, the means and mode of protest of the past. There is a certain need for new modes, since the capitalist state responds with new weapons as well, so it’s not just culture wars, it’s not just wars of ideology, it’s actually in some respects not just a war of position. It is also the war of manoeuvre and skirmishes. And when you win those skirmishes the feeling of solidarity and the feeling of triumph is electric.

A. N. A.: Definitely! As Slavoj Žižek puts it very nicely, referring to Benjamin Walter’s “On the Concept of History” at the end of his film “The Pervert’s Guide to ideology”: every authentic revolution, is “not only directed towards the future but it redeems also the past failed revolutions. All the ghosts as it were; the living dead of the past revolution – which are roaming around, unsatisfied will finally – find their home in the new freedom.”

D. H.: Yes, that’s nice learning from the past and looking, building for the future. And in these times of neoliberal and neoconservative assault- taking nationalist forms in much of the world (Trump, Modi, Erdogan, UKIP, Theresa May, Orban, Le Pen, the Law and Justice Party in Poland) there is an ongoing radicalization. Radicalisation to the Right and radicalisation to the Left. We have to intervene in these culture wars, in these wars of ideology, in these electoral wars, in these street wars and demonstrations, in the class war we must not demobilise! We can see radicalisation to the Left, to different versions

of the Left- to left social democrats such as Melenchon, Bernie Sanders, Jeremy Corbyn, and to groups further Left, to Marxism. People who were conservative 3 months ago are now liberal, people who were liberal 3 months ago are now social democrat, people who were social democrat 3 months ago are now revolutionary Marxists or anarcho-syndicalists. So people change and all people, or as Gramsci at his time put it, all men (sic) are intellectual, everybody has the ability to analyse, to evaluate, to synthesize and people's consciousness does change. For Marx and Gramsci and for Freire that's the key task of revolutionaries. The key task is to change the consciousness.

A. N. A.: For Gramsci the “change of consciousness” meant the transformative educational site of the war of position, the demystification of ideology, where people acquire class consciousness. How would you define transformative education?

D. H.: It's not just pedagogy. Transformative education involves questions of curriculum, it involves questions of pedagogy, it involves questions of organization and control of the state apparatuses of schools, colleges, universities and it involves questions of the internal organization, such as how the students are organized, how the staff- the teachers and other school workers are organized, whether they are organized in a hierarchical stratified way, where the top achievers (kids, teachers) being praised and the low achievers being vilified.

So transformative education is not just a question of critical pedagogy, it's not just a question of listening and valuing and, using Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital and symbolic violence, its not just a question of listening to and valuing minorities and working class experience, contributions, lives. Transformative education goes beyond that valuing, it goes into a question of curriculum as well. I've always been a firm believer in various school teaching, college teaching and university teaching jobs I have had, in each one I have believed and I found Gramsci's thought useful in actually saying, look this is what I think. I think that however limited the spaces within a curriculum, and whatever the level of surveillance, teacher can “ask the awkward questions” (including of the curriculum itself) and present, smuggle in or trumpet out (depending on the circumstances and appropriate tactics) counter-hegemonic ideology and analysis. And, as I have said, and written about, critical education, critical transformative socialist education also includes questions of organisation of the schooling system, education system – not just questions of pedagogy and curriculum. Having said that, questions of pedagogy and curriculum are of course, important... it's at the interpersonal chalkface. Simon Boxley and I have, recognising this obvious statement, [written on critical teacher education](#), social and economic justice, pedagogy and curriculum, for example, and there are libraries of books on critical pedagogy, by, for example, Peter McLaren, Henry Giroux, Michael W. Apple, Antonia Darder. One that had a major impact on me was Henry Giroux's “Teachers as Transformative Intellectuals”.

A. N. A.: What you've mentioned during your lecture, which is quite Freirean, that we shouldn't be neutral and that education is an act of influencing from a definite, explicit political standpoint...

D. H.: Absolutely, I'm not a liberal pluralist and don't believe in liberal pluralist analysis or practice. So I feel no compunction at all about saying, look, I'm going to teach you something different, I'm going to teach you the workers' history of this country, I'm going to teach you about how a tiny minority maintain control, and how things could be so much more just and equal, and I'm going to try to teach you how to critically interrogate and deconstruct what's going on.

L. R.: One of the most awesome, amazing, inspirational and innovative approaches to transformative education we saw in Israel. We went to some bilingual schools, where Palestinian and Jewish children were taught together in the same school, while most of the schools there are absolutely separated. In Israel they never mix Arab and Jewish children in schools, but what we saw was an approach where they went to the same class and same school and they were always taught by two teachers, one Palestinian and one Israeli teacher. The transformation then, what happened there, was constant and constantly also negotiated, because once you start teaching history you of course start thinking whose history am I teaching here. And the words that they had for 1948 “Al-Nakba” about the “glorious day of liberation” and of course for the others it was the deepest suffering “the disaster of Al-Nakba”...

D. H.: ...where hundreds of thousands of Palestinian Arabs were evicted from their homes, and many killed.

L. R.: So, in the Hand-in-Hand schools we saw, you have children everyday discussing these matters, children! We saw 8 and 9 and 10 year olds and then they started suggesting solutions, because that still is such an issue there, the issue of the expulsion of the Arabs 1946-49.

“I always think of this one child who had said: “this land is nobody’s land, until they learn to agree.” “

I always think of this one child who had said: “this land is nobody’s land, until they learn to agree.” I think it is possible, but what *it is* changes shape daily and the meanings are negotiated daily, the meanings of curriculum, the meanings of subject, the meanings of the content, as well as how you work with children to understand those complexities, but of course they understand them just as well as we do...What makes it deeply political is that it was something real, it wasn’t just a hypothetical question it was absolutely real in that context. And they had to decide what meaning they are going to give, what we are going to think when we study history, what is geography, whose land, where the borders go – all that had to be negotiated. For them it was real and meaningful and had a purpose and their place where they lived was not a contented place, there were constant examples of violence and oppression – and children knew about them. But it translates then, that in every context you would have similar struggles, so it is not engaging in hypothetical terms, but actually here today in Wroclaw for example these are the issues, what would you do?

D. H.: We are talking about there being 6 such schools in the whole of the State of Israel, the “Hand-in-Hand” schools. This raises the question of the macro-organisation of the schooling system, where we deal with, confront the class-segregated, or in the case of Israel, the ethnic segregation, apartheid, of the schooling system Palestinian Arab and Jewish Israeli children almost all attend segregated schools. That’s where we meet political and structural questions that are broader than pedagogy. That’s why I earlier suggested that we need to look at pedagogy, at curriculum content – which can come from negotiated curriculum with children, with students, with communities -, but in our discussion of transformative education and its parameters there is also the question of the internal organization of the school, and the organization of the schooling system itself. [I’ve written about this.](#)

That particular type of school we saw would need two things I think. Firstly, at a macro-political level, such a system of schooling that we saw, Jewish and Arab children in the same school and class, Jewish and Arab teachers working together, needs to be made national, not just happen in six schools (though that’s a valuable start, and valuable for

those participating). But, secondly, at the ideological level, a Marxist would go further than we all just have to be nice to each other and listen to each other's points of view – that's a liberal pluralist approach. Now if you are in a conservative system (schooling system or country, or indeed any dictatorial authoritarian system, then, by comparison, liberal pluralism is a huge advantage. If you come out of a fascist or ethno Zionist or a Stalinist dictatorship, it's quite nice to be able to disagree and not be shot or disciplined, so liberal pluralism is a huge advance on communist, or conservative fascist authoritarianism. But we need, as Marxists, to go further. To go further and encourage, facilitate, children and citizenry to understand and teach the children perhaps by getting members of their different communities in by saying, Why? Why is it like this? What could it be like? What function and which groups, class, (or "raced" class groups) does the State of Israel or any other state such as the UK, or Poland, serve? Who promoted the State of Israel? What function does it serve for global capitalism and controlling the Middle-East? So I would lead it into a discussion of questions of economic and global political questions and then relate it back down to the local context.

L. R.: Yes, that's right, Dave. This is one of the utmost pedagogical questions – why are things like this? How did they get like this?

D. H.: And, of course, political engagement, as a student, as a teacher is not easy. But don't give up! Of course they, the government in the UK, wants you to concentrate on the job and getting good grades. In England students are paying 27.000 GBP for university degree, so the explicit message to them is "make sure you work hard and don't go on demonstrations anymore, you have to concentrate on getting your money's worth".

"And, of course, political engagement, as a student, as a teacher is not easy. But don't give up!"

Of course it is difficult, it has always been difficult to be an oppositionist, to be a critic, to engage in critical analysis, in Stalin's Russia, in East Germany under the Stasi, in Hitler's Germany, in Calvin's Geneva, in Britain's colonial Kenya, during the terror in the French revolution. At a lower level it was also difficult in the 1980-1990s in England to be an oppositional educator, which is why some of us set up the Hillcole Group of Radical Left Educators (see [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)). And why we have the Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies (www.jceps.com) and the annual **International Conference on Critical Education** – all of which provide intellectual, theoretical, emotional solidarity.

And yes, some of us got sidelined regularly, not promoted, moved on.

But there is the need throughout history for civic courage! I know, sometimes we are in "Kafkaesque" situations, but sometimes we have to *take over the castle*...