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**Review of *The Developing World and State Education: Neoliberal Depredation and Egalitarian Alternatives* edited by Dave Hill and Ellen Rosskam (Routledge, 2009)**

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This is Dave Hill's fourth edited book in a Routledge series on the worldwide neoliberal assault on education. Superbly crafted with his co-editor Ellen Rosskam, this volume is not for the fainthearted. It unapologetically points fingers, takes sides, and challenges the reader to resist.

*The Developing World and State Education* has an introduction by Rosskam, followed by a general chapter on Latin America, then individual chapters on Mexico, Argentina, Venezuela, Chile, Turkey, Pakistan, India, Burkina Faso, South Africa, Mozambique, and China. The nations represented likely reflect the availability of authors rather than a theoretical standpoint. Otherwise, we would not expect the top-heavy delegation from Spanish-speaking Latin America, the absence of Eastern European examples, only two cases each from central Asia and Africa, and only one case from eastern Asia. A chapter on Cuba would have been quite informative. Still, the volume works as a global case against neoliberalism and its crimes against the classroom. Indeed, an interested reader can take the insights and principles found in the various chapters and apply them to other cases, an exercise likely to bear rich results.

Dave Hill's foreword sets the tone, and there is no let-up in the chapters that follow. He initiates the book's relentless attack on neoliberal education policy. One cannot be any blunter than to charge the criminal with mass murder. "Neoliberal globalizing capital condemns millions ... to death" (xv), writes Hill. For the masses still alive, the outlook remains grim since neoliberalism "can cope with, co-exist with, extreme poverty and the existence of billions of humans at the margins of existence" (xv).

Neoliberalism, as Hill notes, is "unfettered capitalism." In other words, despite the beguiling etymological root *liber*, neoliberalism has nothing to do with individual freedom or social justice. It is not the antipode to neoconservatism, but rather a contemporary *liberation of capital*. It is capital's self-proclaimed right to cross borders and insinuate itself in any and every conceivable domain, to turn everything into a commodity and bring that commodity to market. Tragically, this includes education.

But the book makes clear that neoliberalism is far more than the generalization of commodification. In the realm of education, neoliberalism is compelled to stop short of the complete transformation of public schools into private schools. This is because the ruling class finds it easier and vastly more efficient to coerce students into a controlled curriculum and alien ideology when the curriculum, and the rewards and punishments that follow its successful or unsuccessful imposition, have the force of state law.

Thus, Hill is absolutely correct in drawing attention to the fact that “[w]hile governments may well wish to privatize education, they feel they need to retain control of its content, its mechanisms and monitoring of ideological reproduction and the production/reproduction of labor power” (xvi). Contrary to some current critical viewpoints, the aim of neoliberalism in education is not to destroy public education. Rather, neoliberalism controls education in the interests of capital.

In an advanced capitalist country like the United States, such a move occurs via a federal law (No Child Left Behind) that applies only to public schools, and not to private schools. In her introduction, Roskam notes that the alternative to having a neoliberal education law that applies only to public schools is to have a universal law, one that applies to both private and public schools, but to sabotage the material capacity of the state to fully monitor all the schools for compliance. Then, “[w]here financial commitment and the needed increase in human resources for inspectorates by the state are insufficient, the space and scope for maneuvering around state required curriculum can only grow in private institutions” (1).

Either way, it is clear that neoliberal education policy is class-based. A controlled curriculum for public schools, or one that is universal but only enforced in public schools, is tantamount to saying that it is a curriculum for the children of the working class. It follows that this curriculum, insofar as it is conceived of by the ruling class for application to young workers-to-be, is fashioned to advance the material interests of capital. It teaches obedience and the acceptance of one’s alienated lot in life, and offers the illusion of free choice by helping students identify talents and skills of particular usefulness to the capitalists. To the extent that it promotes the neoliberal agenda, the capitalist-controlled curriculum does not permit students to discover and develop their own patterns of thinking and questioning, their own skills and talents, their own notions of reality. In other words, “the market suppresses critical thought and education itself” (Hill xviii). Unfettered neoliberalism will suppress these even more.

This book clearly aims to achieve its stated overall goal of resistance by providing the reader with facts, theory, and arguments that contribute to undermining the legitimacy of the neoliberal regime. As Hill puts it, “[F]or various groups of trade unionists, social movements, greens, and groups such as the World Development Movement, Attac, and Globalise Resistance, the current system is not legitimate” (xvii). But the intended audience is broader than these: “[T]he current system also lacks legitimacy for many in academe and many in the population at large, those who see that material conditions of

their existence are demeaned and degraded by neoliberal capitalism – or, indeed, by the capitalist system itself” (xvii).

Thus, this book is a challenge to academics to join the social movements. But what should the relationship be between academics and the social movements if resistance is to be successful? Even more, what is the role of academics when the social movements are quiet, perhaps even hibernating, as they wait for some left-sounding demagogic leader to carry out the change that can really only be accomplished by the masses themselves?

Both the questions and their answers are contained only implicitly throughout the book. But they are there, and the critical reader will gain more from the book by considering them in the course of its reading.

Hill characterizes the present situation as one in which radical academic thought finds itself looking for volcanic eruptions from the poor and oppressed, but discovers very little: “[A]t the current time, a lack of effective widespread social mobilization for positive change has left the current system, the status quo for the most part intact” (xvii).

Yet the existence of “widespread social mobilization,” while a necessary ingredient for successful resistance, is dangerously insufficient. As Davidson-Harden and Schugurensky note in their chapter on “Neoliberalism and Education in Latin America”:

The history of neoliberalism in Latin America can be traced at least to 1973, when a U.S.-backed coup deposed the democratically elected government of Salvador Allende in Chile. The new regime, a brutal military dictatorship led by Augusto Pinochet, immediately began to implement a set of economic policies recommended by the “Chicago boys” under the tutelage of Milton Friedman, who equated free markets with social and political freedom, and had been advocating for school vouchers since the 1950s. Without need to pass policies through Parliament, Chile soon became the testing ground for neoliberalism. It is pertinent to remember this, because in Latin America neoliberalism did not fall from the sky. What fell from the sky were the bombs that destroyed the government building of La Moneda in Santiago on September 11, 1973 (13)

Indeed, the neoliberal blitzkrieg is what destroyed the social movements that brought Allende to power. The only thing that stood a chance of successfully repelling the attack was a decisive leadership with an uncompromising anti-neoliberal program. This was lacking in the popular front (Unidad Popular) ruling coalition that Allende led, which unfortunately tied the hands of the social movements to the capitalist “partners” in Allende’s government.

Thus, the question of *revolutionary leadership* must rise to the top in any discussion of how to resist neoliberalism. Not only the example of Chile, but many others as well, show that even the most politically liberal representatives of the neoliberal state cannot be trusted. The important chapter on South Africa (Chapter 11, Vally, Motala, & Ramadro) discusses the neoliberal trap that awaits a leadership, however revolutionary it

may have been in its anti-apartheid struggle, that limits itself to bourgeois democratic demands within a capitalist framework. The equally important chapter on China (Chapter 13, Mok and Wallo) discusses the neoliberal propagation of social inequities that awaits a population whose leadership once had revolutionary credentials, but is now retreating behind policies that equate development with capital accumulation.

In the developing world, the question of revolutionary leadership translates into the need to understand that no amount of demagogic “anti-imperialist” rhetoric can turn a member of a capitalist party into a trustworthy anti-neoliberalism fighter. Indeed, the native capitalist classes in these countries are deformed members of the world bourgeoisie. They can hardly be expected to mount a challenge to the imperialist centers to capture key markets for themselves. Their outlooks are limited by their *dependency* on the imperialist centers. They necessarily carry out the neoliberal agenda in their own countries at the behest of their patrons abroad. In schooling, this amounts to fashioning in young workers-to-be the labor skills required by global capital.

This dual theme is discernible in each of the chapters on particular national manifestations of neoliberal education policy – that the native bourgeoisie carries out the larger neoliberal agenda (and is therefore no friend of the anti-neoliberal mass movements), and that the role of public schools in these countries is fundamentally the same as in the imperialist centers, namely, to manufacture and set regional borders on the changing, contemporary tapestry of labor power.

The great strength of the book lies in its capacity to expose global neoliberal policy without compromising the treatment of local particulars. Indeed, it is precisely through thoroughly researched local particulars that the broader menace is exposed. Each chapter is another stop on a world tour of class and classroom struggle. some select examples follow.

In Mexico (Chapter 3, Delgado-Ramos and Saxe-Fernández), 2004 statistics indicate that the average number of years of schooling is 7.3. This compares with 11 years in Cuba, the Latin American country with the region’s top such educational achievement. Furthermore, illiteracy in Mexico is estimated at around 11 percent, with poorer areas such as Chiapas and Guerrero approaching 50%. Thus, there can be no question of educational need.

Unfortunately, Mexico has signed on to the World Bank’s neoliberal program. At the university level, this includes increased tuition and other fees, along with increasing “entrepreneurship” among faculty, basically to generate their own incomes.

As Delgado-Ramos and Saxe-Fernández point out:

[I]n Mexico, these (difficulties in the practical implementation of neoliberal policy, SLS) have been ‘well’ understood by the local and powerful elite. Since the 90s, through its deputies and senators the private sector has introduced in the legislative

agenda new bills that call for opening the education and public health sectors to private investment based on “service-rendering projects” agreements. (37)

The World Bank has “its ‘country managers’ – from the ‘president’ and its cabinet, all the way down the federal bureaucracy” (37).

Central to the World Bank’s Mexico program is “a new culture” of “standardized national tests” (39), in which “the content of teaching and the process of educating new generations are no longer relevant.” Rather, the primary beneficiary of test-based funding is “the ‘competitiveness’ of the private sector” (39).

The results so far include a massive “brain drain,” welcomed by the North, as it provides information technology labor skills paid for by Mexico. In fact, from Latin America as a whole “1.1 million scientists and researchers” have been “‘exported’ to the North” (44).

On the other hand, “workers on the periphery either die in their attempt to migrate north, or are stigmatized as “illegal.” In the end, Mexico remains underdeveloped, and the neoliberal engine to the north has achieved its “upside down welfare state,” with the native capitalist class and their politicians paid off for a job well-done as accomplices in crime.

The migration phenomenon is even more general. It is both cross-border and internal, and not always South-to-North. In countries with staggering rates of unemployment, migration from one developing country to another one is common. In countries where education workers can expect poor pay and working conditions, they migrate within the same country to other occupations.

The case of Argentina (Chapter 4, Ginden) shows how teachers are a fundamental part of the educational equation and how the neoliberal assault affects not only students, but teachers as well. A necessary consequence of curriculum control by the state is the re-tooling of teacher training. Ginden states that “[n]eoliberal reforms in education questioned teacher’s pedagogical capabilities” (55). Furthermore, they eroded teachers’ working conditions. According to Ginden, “Teachers were forced to play the role of social workers, infrastructure conditions declined, violence increased inside schools, and teacher dissatisfaction grew because of low valorization of their work. [...] The whole transformation strained teachers’ mental health problems such as depression and emotional tiredness” (55).

Teachers unions led the various struggles against neoliberal reforms. According to Ginden, “Certain political developments cannot be understood without considering the teachers’ protest period from 1991-2001. They led the erosion of the neoliberal education reform projects and put teachers’ working conditions at the forefront of the political agenda” (64). But the unions were also “catalysts of the social opposition to educational policies and even to the neoliberalist program as a whole” (64). The militancy of educators was clearly seen in the willingness of many teachers and professors to participate in hunger strikes. They were among the leadership of the anti-

neoliberal social movements, having to confront “the difficulties of a center-left political project” (62).

In Venezuela (Chapter 5, Muhr and Verger), the “expressly anti-neoliberal and anti-neocolonial” (72) leadership of the Chavez government declared in its constitution (Article 103 of the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 2000) the right to free education all the way up to the undergraduate level. This “probably constitutes the most revolutionary dimension of Bolivarian education” and “is supported by a range of nonformal missions at all educational levels.” This new leadership explicitly challenges the market based rhetoric about “the primary motivation” of schooling being “individual social mobility” and counterposes “empowerment and endogenous development” (72).

One of the practical challenges facing the Bolivarian leadership is access to higher education. No doubt, this is a problem throughout the developing world. Kumar’s chapter on India (Chapter 9) has particularly illuminating discussion of the problem of access to increasingly privatized education.

In Latin America only 28% of the eligible population is enrolled in higher education, compared to 60% in Europe and North America (79). Clearly, only the resources of the state can take on this daunting task with any seriousness. Among other measures, the Chavez leadership instituted free public transportation for students.

As a result, “[B]y 2006, nearly 77 percent of the hitherto excluded 472,363 *bachilleres* of all ages [...] exercised their right” to higher education, of which 57% were women (80). The “democratization of access” program faced head-on the legacy of students “from poor backgrounds [who] were systematically excluded as they: a) came from ‘second class’ public schools with reduced chances to pass entry examinations compared to the wealthy from private institutions who b) could afford special preparatory classes” (80).

The anti-Chavez rhetoric from all recent U.S. administrations raises the specter of neoliberalism’s past deeds in Chile and Argentina, where it opted for putschist violence as the best means to steer the state along a more narrow path of freedom for market principles.

Indeed, Chile (Chapter 6, Pastrana), “in the late 1970s, following a military coup, [...] with its population brutally suppressed, became the first testing ground for the changes that now define the logic of neoliberal capitalism” ( 91). The “neoliberal economic framework [...] applied to all sectors of society – health, housing, social security, fisheries, agriculture, transportation and of course – education” (91).

In Chile, neoliberals demonstrated quite clearly their view that the market has more rights than human beings. Built on the backs of a beaten and politically castrated population, the U.S.-backed marshal government “redefined government role in education to the narrow realms of setting national standards – linked to a fairly comprehensive national curriculum – and testing” (93). Interestingly, Pastrana points out that the performance

gaps “in the three types of schools” – public, private subsidized, and private paid – were associated with the “richer or poorer” resources of the community. If we are permitted to generalize from this, the neoliberal program of standards and testing will both reflect and reinforce already-existing economic disparities. For this reason alone, egalitarian education can only be rooted in an egalitarian society.

In Turkey (Chapter 7, Ercan and Uzunyayla), the bourgeois leadership’s goal of joining the European Union has led to its embracing neoliberal education policy. Capitalist associations, such as the Turkish Enterprise and Businessmen’s Confederation, hold that “on the road to joining the European Union, the country’s education system should be structured in such a way that utilizes its young population to get ahead in international competition, promotes youth’s involvement in the labour power, and fulfills businesses’ needs” ( 114). Another business group declared its desire to “transform students into global entrepreneurs, technicians, and researchers” (114).

Thus, when the explicit goal is economic union with global leaders of the neoliberal regime, the openly declared education policy is unabashedly to treat schools as factories to manufacture the needed labor power.

In Pakistan (Chapter 8, Mukhtar), “unbridled privatization” (125) is the central theme of neoliberal policies. Mukhtar states that “[t]here is a clear sense” in which this has been “forced” on Pakistani society. For example, powerful forces in GATS (General Agreement on Trade and Services, the neoliberal regime that handles education) “requested” that Pakistan “‘open up’ educational services to free market trade” (125). As Mukhtar comments, “It is not simple for a developing country to disregard such ‘requests’ made by countries and organizations such as the U.S.A., Japan, and the EU” (125).

This has, according to Mukhtar, led to a “deterioration of educational quality” (126) for the majority of people. Fees at the growing number of private schools are prohibitively high. Low teacher pay and the lack of stable job security are undermining the attractiveness of the teaching profession, leading to significant declines in enrollment at teacher training institutions. Luring competent teachers to rural areas, where they are badly needed, and where the vast majority of schools are non-private, is a formidable task becoming even more insurmountable.

Mukhtar summarizes the effects of neoliberal policy on public education as “the distortion of the social purposes of education when education becomes centered on its relationship to the economy” (128). This is an ambiguous statement. Is education pathologically centered around the economy when the distribution of schools into town and country, the allocation of material resources, the level of training of teachers, and the accessibility by students is a function of the prevailing market economy? Or is it centered around the economy when the goals of schooling are to produce specific labor skills among future proletarians and self-confident class consciousness among those who will rule?

Clearly, neoliberalism is very much concerned with both of these interpretations. But education will also be “centered on its relationship to the economy” even following a successful resistance to, even an overthrow of the neoliberal state. Only now it will be centered around its relationship to a post-capitalist economic regime. Will education still suffer? Will it be distorted as long as *any* state exists, even when that state is a workers state?

The answer to that question is likely “yes.” But the other side of the coin is that education will achieve its highest imaginable form –universal access, the nurturing of critical thinking, the flowering of both creative individual expression and social solidarity, the total absence of alienated modes of thinking – to the extent that the state withers away in parallel with the material elimination of class society.

In Burkina Faso (Chapter 10, Somé), the abject poverty raises serious questions about strategies of resistance. According to a 2007 United Nations report, Burkina Faso ranked lowest in the world in literacy rates. Somé points out that it is next to lowest in the world in GD. Fewer than half the children are enrolled in primary school, and only 9% are in secondary school. Enrollment of girls is far below that of boys. Living conditions are squalid, especially in urban areas. This is the legacy of the former French imperialism.

With widespread poverty and social inequities, it is impossible to imagine developing a culture of education, let alone critical and democratic education, without a simultaneous enhancement of the more general infrastructure and superstructure of the society as a whole. Cuba may be a country where educational successes have produced a level of consciousness among the broad masses of people that is out of proportion to the material conditions of their lives, an interesting dilemma worth further consideration. But it is probably safe to say that this is hardly the goal, and that society must develop as a whole organism, albeit unevenly and with heterogeneous tempos. There can be no isolated education reform or education revolution.

This means that resistance to the neoliberal agenda in education must transcend education itself. Resistance must have its own agenda to democratize both education and the larger society.

Thus, in a discussion of the capacity for Burkina Faso education unions to struggle, Somé notes that “the best the education unions can do is to unite, ignoring their differences that are minor when compared to the major, primary, contradictions that pit them against the government that has sided with the international capital to the detriment of the basic social needs of the populations. A more sustainable strategy would be to knit alliances with the civil society and international workers to allow struggles to actually shake the base of the government.” Paraskeva’s chapter on Mozambique (Chapter 12), for example, bears on this problem, as it is an outstanding discussion of the central role played by the struggle for women’s rights in the battle against neoliberal policy, clearly demonstrating the importance of establishing links between educators and other members of the mass movements.



More lessons await the reader of this important book. It should not sit quietly on academic shelves, to be opened occasionally for a statistical reference. Rather, it should be in the laps of all those who are committed to the global struggle for social justice. This includes not only education workers, but all those fighting the neoliberal agenda.

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