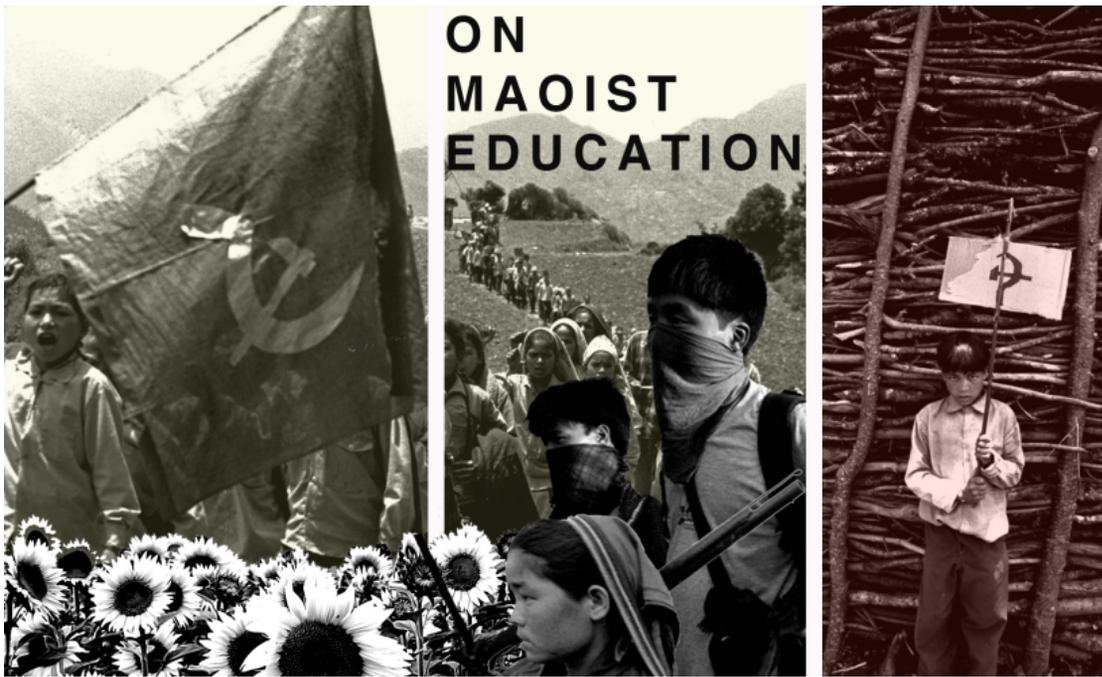


On Maoist Education

JULY 31, 2018

STRUGGLESESSIONS



What is the purpose of education under capitalism? When the bourgeoisie created public libraries and schools for the proletariat as a whole, they did so not out of some Christian benevolence, though they may have claimed such at times. Education under capitalism is an acculturation process for increasing the surplus value they could take from their proletariat. The bourgeoisie came to finally see the importance of basic numeracy education and literacy, but provided nothing else for them, especially in the realm of philosophy and the social sciences. The increase of the value of labor-power with a worker's education finds its complement in the arithmetical rise in the worker's skills (i.e. labor's ability to add value during the production process).

The Political Economy of Capitalist Education

Like industrial factories, the education factories of schools and universities allocate time and resources and personnel to produce this increase in value of the commodity of labor power. From the moment children enter kindergarten, they enter unwaged in a waged society. They were once in primitive

Communism an integral part of the productive activity of settlements, involved in food gathering closer to the settlement. The work they did was part of the total social product. The introduction of mandatory attendance of children in public schools was the beginning of a new process of defining labor for the young and able-bodied.

In many ways education under capitalism for children from ages 5 to 18 is about being ideologically molded into objects of care and discipline, in homes and in schools, to be future workers. But this has contradictory aspects. On one hand, all children must be forced into acquiescing to discipline and especially the discipline of working, of being exploited in order to be able to eat. Everywhere the labor that capitalists want done is seen in the priorities of the education it's established – the training available is divided and each category is parceled out intentionally – so that street sweepers are given those skills, and bankers, others.

On the other hand, literacy appears to be at the child's advantage. It becomes the means in which children can historically develop a critical literacy and revolutionary capacity. In light of the conformity and “book knowledge” (this concept will be expounded on later) pushed onto young students in grade and high schools, a level of agency, politics, and historical memory is also unintentionally provided in capitalist education, though it can only often be located and grabbed through self-learning outside of the curriculum established by reactionary school boards. In most cases, particularly for proletarian students and students from proletarian communities, young people enter the work place earlier on. There is an acquisition of certain skills, customs, and class consciousness earlier on with students here—an affliction and gift that makes it harder for them to enter into the ranks of the petty bourgeoisie, but that also gives them a knowledge that is alien to “book knowledge.”

College represents a period where students, as being a stratum in a transitional period abstracted from the relations of production, enter a period of potentially adding more value to their labor. Unlike reproductive labor which reproduces the means of production by giving the condition for life itself, the intellectual labor that students do in college deals with intellectual reproduction. It's to create a replacement labor force. Even in community colleges and state universities where the most proletarianized section of students attend, enters sections of many who want to become manager of this system, to become its enforcers, and to become its petty bourgeois winners. This consciousness among many students is not just produced by the class background of students and the character of book knowledge, but in the class distinctions between those in manual and mental labor and in how university campuses/campus life exist separate and in many ways in antagonism to the proletarian communities that surround them.

Even with many degrees that don't add much value to the student's future labor power, there are many created to produce nonprofit staffers and managers, to help preserve the bourgeois state project by giving it a diverse, inclusive, culturally affirming veneer. Though these programs were originally pushed for inclusion on program listings on the basis that they'd create "organic intellectuals," they've produced little. Programs such as ethnic studies, women's studies, industrial organization/labor studies, and queer studies have been connected to providing sensitivity trainings to pigs, corporate seminars, and remote islands of "safe spaces." Many who are often well meaning major in and graduate from these programs, not knowing that they'll be utilized by the enemy.

To proceed further, what is this book knowledge? Mao explains:

“What sort of knowledge is the bookish information of the students? Granted that their information is entirely true knowledge, it is still not knowledge acquired through their own personal experience but only a matter of theories written down by their forefathers to sum up the experiences of the struggle for production and of the struggle between classes. It must be understood that in a certain sense such knowledge is to them still something one-sided, something which has been verified by others but not yet by themselves.”

Book knowledge is a pre-defined, standardized set of known skills and competencies that are acquired not by participation in production and class struggle, but by highly individualized and highly mystified abstracted means. Capitalist education, especially as austerity pushes ever-more-tighter empiricist- and data-driven methods for choosing the most ‘successful’ students who enter its academic programs and courses for pass and fail, values this theory. It is one that is divorced from practice. But practical knowledge is also a capitalist pedagogy, focusing merely on the partial and perceptive. It is in many ways the knowledge of economism in that it’s often produced by the sectional or direct experience of workers and oppressed people but one sided, a form of practice that is detached from theory.

The standardized testing which determines entry into college focuses on this book knowledge. This serves to perpetuate class inequality and national oppression. Rather than measuring intelligence, it often just measures a pupils’ *historical access to resources, as well as proximity to the dominant oppressor nation.*

Today in the USA these colleges are the preserve of the petty bourgeois and bourgeois, from whom only a handful of experts will graduate to be called

alumni and enter into the class of their parents. Building a well-trained core of experts, regardless of their political outlook to society around them, takes priority over developing the knowledge and skills of millions of workers and the most lower- and oppressed-sectors of the population in general. It is clear that in the development of a Maoist Communist Party and revolutionary People's war, the revolutionary students and educational workers, subordinated to the proletarian movement rather than separate or semi-autonomous or analogous to it, have a special role in producing graduates who are both "red and expert." This was the policy during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, where students were expected to gain knowledge and skills that could be used to solve society's problems and of providing mass education, for the purpose of abolishing class distinctions in manual and mental labor. This is done by combining education with production. What does this mean?

Education with Proletarian Politics in Command

As early as 1847 Marx and Engels called for the "combination of education with industrial production" and Lenin in 1919 for the "closest connection between schooling and productive social labor of the child." Mao likewise said that "education must serve proletarian politics and be combined with productive labor. Working people should master intellectual work and intellectuals should integrate themselves with the working people." To break with "left" bourgeois and revisionist student activists with the false theory of students-as-proletarian-actors and push economist schemes of tuition and fee freezes, the proletarian movement and student movement necessarily must dare to dream higher, of dynamiting the old education factories and building a new way of learning.

This destroying of the old ways by combining education with production will have several aspects:

(a) Having the proletariat exercise dictatorship over education and policies within it through three-in-one committees and the three combinations. Communist activists, students and workers from communities develop curriculum and pedagogical methods together.

Attendance is not enough, students would have to attend school to manage it and transform it.

(b) Breaking the isolation of academic institutions and research facilities from the communities they should exist in and serve. This is done not just by eliminating tuition and opening admissions for everyone, but also through “regularization,” or building new model schools that are spread out on an ever-widening, grassroots scale, integrating education into where the people are at.

Gone would be colleges as privileged petty bourgeois spaces that exclude others. Students and educational workers would go deep among the masses, doing field education to apply properly at all times what they are learning.

1. c) Train new workers who have Communist political consciousness and culture.

One of the most important contributions of Mao Zedong was the need for the continuation of revolution under socialism and how no ideology was a non-class or above-class ideology, meaning that ideological struggle over education and intellectual methods is crucial, for it is what will either prepare new generations to become conscious and critical actors in great historic transformations, or to become future bourgeois managers and experts in a revisionist-capitalist society. Even a decade after Liberation it was found that rote memorization was still the norm in classrooms, since the teachers had been trained by the old order. In higher education, as late as 1958, more than 90% of the professors had been trained during the old period. Admission exams were used in a large number of schools, keeping peasants and workers out. A great number of schools were far from the fields and rice paddies, concentrated in the great cities. The political line of the revisionists in education served the program of the bourgeoisie by strengthening the more privileged factory managers, technical experts and government officials.

The first socialist education campaign prepared the stage for the later campaigns of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution to come. In the film *Breaking with Old Ideas* which was produced during a time in which Mao and his line was actually not being pushed (the revisionist Liu Shaoqui was in charge) an agricultural school was the backdrop, and it depicted scenes from the socialist education campaign. *Breaking* would ultimately act as a precursor for the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution to come – a story where a new Principal Lung, along with a widowed peasant mother, a blacksmiths son and apprentice, all organize the people of their own to throw off the bourgeois line governing education at the school. A new school made out of bamboo and leaves was built in the mountains closer to where peasants live, admissions were opened to all peasants and workers regardless of literacy (in one scene Principal Lung accepts a pupil—the blacksmith—because of how calloused his hands were), arrogant students and teachers from the old society were

struggled with, and the curriculum and methods of teaching were debated and determined on a mass level. The socialist education campaign was ultimately incomplete – the revisionist line was still in command, which led to Mao, then unseated and fearing capitalist restoration, to call for a new generation to fire another salvo in what became known as the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, making a new war within the education system.

Mao's call for intellectuals to go "deep among the masses" was met with enthusiasm by many, but with reluctance by some, leading for demands that "careerism be fought not merely in words, but in deeds." The difference between mental and manual labor and the monopoly of culture and science was fought by abolishing admission exams and forcing the doors open of privileged pagodas. Through struggle, partly out of frustrations that classes were scheduled during important seedling periods that kept peasants out in the fields, a part-study/part-work system allowed for many to keep working while learning. This led the entry of thousands of workers and peasants into colleges who, beyond being taught technical knowledge alone, opened prefectures of learning in the fields that peasants worked, in the dining halls of factories, and elsewhere. Intellectuals started to live in the homes of poor and lower middle peasants and recruited them in their research pursuits, while also helping them out in the fields.

The Chungtso County Weather Station Workers, for example, were meteorology and weather students that left their technical schools and went to live among the peasants. The peasants, in dealing with their long struggle against nature, developed folk sayings to pass down generations to protect rice seedlings from incremental weather, charting everything from insect movements of ants moving their hills or worms more actively crawling about or dragonflies hovering lower than usual, to interpreting sky conditions and wind movement. Peasant experience was combined with book knowledge and

meteorological data was created which successfully predicted typhoons and cold winds for the years to come.

Likewise the more notable efforts of the “Barefoot Doctors” encouraged community-level preventative medicine, as well as the imitation mass mobilizations to drain fever producing swamps and encourage sedentary practices.

American doctor Joshua Horn in *Healthcare in China* outlined his experience organizing all his hospital staff, from directors, surgeons, professors, physicians, residents, junior doctors, nurses, cooks, bottle-washers, lavatory workers, administrators, gardeners, boiler-men, and laundry men, into a mobile team that would go to an area in the barren north to teach peasant doctors (indeed—upwards of around 1 million peasant doctors, midwives, birth control workers and sanitary workers were taught out of the peasant population). When they arrived to this barren and mountainous area they built their own medical school, and it looked nothing like Harvard or Columbia, but they planned it themselves. When the peasants farm season came to an end with the arrival of winter, thirty two young peasants were selected. Breaking the “Chinese wall” in the curriculum of beginning and end, where basic sciences were taught far before seeing patients, they cut the school year into a few months, integrating theory with practice. For example, “[when] a patient would come to our clinic with a lung disease we’d examine the lungs, we’d go and dissect the lungs again, see what they looked like, go over the physiology of the lungs, and then advance to the diseases of the lungs, and the treatment of these diseases and the diagnoses of these diseases. So then, knowledge advanced on a broad front, interest was maintained, all aspects of the education they were receiving seemed to be purposeful.”

So when the land thawed and farming season started again, the peasants knew that if anyone got ill, the peasant doctors that were their neighbors can help them. These were cases, which should be copied where the mass line was applied in political, administrative, pedagogic and research work, adopting a method of the free airing of views. There was a policy of “three combinations” applied: of using popular, mass democratic means of working out teaching plans and programs, of combining the methods of teachers and students to the revolutionary movements occurring at that time, and of inviting people with practical experience to give lectures in coordination with teachers in special fields. Students were urged to sleep in class if teachers can’t use lively methods – revolution in education at all times should be upheld as a principle, for it is what will break the distinctions we’ve discussed!

These are some methods of combining education and production, so that those who labor with their minds no longer can govern and lord over those who labor with their strength. The counterrevolutionary coup of Deng’s forces went against the three combinations, bringing back the “closed door policy” of excluding working class from having leadership over educational policy. Decollectivization of the People’s Communes co-occurred with the collapse of revolutionary education, with the barefoot doctors and mobile teams having their primary hospitals and inoculation centers shut down, all forced to take examinations to see if they could be permitted to work in the new capitalist China. Careerism, the individualistic pursuit of higher status that so ruthlessly resembles many schools today, had made its way, bloodstained, back to the new capitalist China (for a look into restoration and the processes underlining how the bourgeoisie grows within the party, read [here](#))

Revisionism and revolutionary education then, will always be in contention with each other.

Revolutionary Education in the Development of PW

One can imagine, in the global centers of capitalism, there could be mass enrollment of all workers in part time and spare time schooling free of charge, allowing the all-around development of all. This would allow workers to be versatile, working in several areas of productive life where there is socially necessary labor to do. Some may choose to go to an institution to learn, but mass initiative and decentralization could be encouraged by allowing schools to be opened anywhere. This is socialist construction, or the creation of economic relations in production that move towards communism, and such construction can only happen first at a germ form, laid down by actual confrontation with the state. To avoid NGO-style educational-volunteering and “skill sharing,” albeit of a grungier form in the absence of forcefully carving out Base Areas through People’s War (PW), would be to avoid an error economism.

These methods of socialist education are developed in an embryo by PW. Just as “Peoples Schools” were developed in the Base Areas in Peru within the shantytowns of Raucana and in the Andes, the struggle to carry the combination of education with productive labor means a fight. It is only in a protracted intervention of violence in which people will become both

proletarians and intellectuals. In conditions of protracted revolutionary warfare in imperialist states there will develop similar parallel institutions, as the activities which use to be carried out by the old state would have to be done by what will become the new. What would such embryonic forms of socialist education look like?

In places like Peru and Nepal which were under conditions of being semi colonial semi feudal countries, promoting literacy and encouraging women to become agents in the revolution were part of the New Democratic tasks of the PW there. Mass literacy campaigns were usually held outside in the fields, absent of electricity and the Internet. In Nepal the model schools were set up by the Martyrs' Association, a mass organization that worked to promote the welfare of the children of PW martyrs. Covering the central district of Nepal, the Rolpa model school taught students math, science, Nepali, English and a general course on Maoism, a fully Maoist curriculum that differs from government and of course private schools. Production was integrated, with teachers and students together cultivating potatoes, cauliflowers and various other vegetables which were used for school meals.

Such development of parallel education institutions and methods of conducting political education will be crucial in PW.

Providing study groups within mass organizations that bring non-proletarian cadres and mass members in contact with the working class break petty bourgeois forms of study.

Only by forcing students and intellectuals to actually understand the relationship they have with others beyond themselves by throwing open the university doors do revolutionary movements open intellectual spaces for oppressed people everywhere.

Article by S. Mazur

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