

Book Reviews/Recensions

CRITICAL EDUCATION AGAINST GLOBAL CAPITALISM: KARL MARX AND REVOLUTIONARY CRITICAL EDUCATION

Paula Allman. (2001). Westport, Connecticut and London: Bergin and Garvey. 275 pages.

Along with Paula Allman's first book on the topic of revolutionary critical education, *Revolutionary Social Transformation: Democratic Hopes, Political Possibilities and Critical Education* (1999),¹ her latest book offers critical educators a renewed sense of possibilities in transforming educational praxis. Allman's critique is a giant step forward in challenging the now dominant paradigm in social theory in general and educational studies in particular—the hegemonic worldview which reduces the world to culture, discourse, or language.

In this book Allman embarks upon a theoretical analysis of Marx's theory of consciousness and envisions revolutionary critical education as an essential component to form a movement capable of challenging and then transforming capitalism.

Before moving into my assessment of Allman's book, let me provide a synopsis of the content. In the first of seven chapters, Allman deals with the litany of capitalism today, what she calls "some of the worst and also most ludicrous absurdities that have resulted from the globalization, or full universalization of capital..." (p. 10). Chapters two and three cover the heart of the matter—Marx's dialectical explanation of capitalism. She states her intention of providing such a lengthy and invigorating account of this explanation as one that will take the reader:

...far enough to be able to understand, and hopefully to be capable of enabling others to understand, why capitalism is inherently and necessarily a global system. This account also indicates why we are currently experiencing the full impact and suffering the repercussions of capital's inherent need to become, more than ever before, a fully internationalized and integrated system of socioeconomic control and domination.... (pp. 10-11)

¹ For a review see Mojab, Shahrzad (2001), "New resources for revolutionary critical education," *Essay Review, Convergence*, 34(1): 118-125.

These two chapters require what Allman calls “perseverance” in order to fully grasp Marx’s explanation of capitalism as he traces its development in the three volumes of *Capital*. She acknowledges and warns her readers of the arduous nature of chapter 3 in which the discussion of Marx’s dialectical conceptualization of capital requires mathematical mental exercise.

Chapter four challenges contemporary critiques of Marx’s explanation of capitalism. In particular, Allman reveals a common misreading and/or misunderstanding of Marx’s social relations of capitalism whereby some critical theorists, including some socialists, mistake property relations or private ownership of means of production for the social relations between capital and labour. It is worth quoting Allman at length on this significant theoretical clarification:

Therefore, while private property, along with other features that we associate with capitalism such as commodities and markets, all predate the specific labor-capital relation of production and serve as preconditions for it, once capitalism has developed, they are the results of that relation. They cease being the actual cause of any of its dire consequences. Clearly, then, it is the social relation between labor and capital that must be abolished if we are to bring an end to any of these results as well as the even more dire consequences of capitalism. (p.140)

The last three chapters engage the reader with the discussion of critical education and, more specifically, Allman’s particular approach that she labels “revolutionary critical education.” She defines her approach as a form of critical education that “is capable of preparing people to take part in the creation of what I call authentic socialism: a society engaged in revolutionary social transformation and the development of the type of communist social formation advocated by Karl Marx...” (p. 162). Chapter six is an effort by the author to exemplify her dialectical understanding of Marx’s theory of capitalism through a detailed account of her educational praxis, what she considers a “fourteen year trial/experience of Freirean education” (p. 189). In the final chapter, Allman proposes strategies critical educators can use in their own context in order to work towards global eradication of capitalist relations.

Having read and re-read this book both individually and in a reading group with graduate students, I think I have a good grasp of the core of Allman’s arguments. I can see a disjuncture in the book which happens between chapters 3 and 4 and the last three chapters. Let me expand on this point: Allman, undoubtedly, gives us a new dialectical tool for reading the world (capitalism) and the word (dialectics). Her precise and painstakingly

detailed explanation of labour-power and value theories in chapter three depicts vividly the capitalist process under which alienated, objectified, and commodified human relations are being (re)produced. However, Allman trusts our ability to carry this understanding with us to navigate through the rest of the book in search of critical educational strategies in order to create a collective socialist consciousness toward the ultimate goal of abolishing capitalism. It would have helped me if Allman had linked her dialectical conceptualization of capitalist relations, explained so comprehensively in previous chapters, to her strategies for the advancement of critical educational praxis.

Allman revolutionizes our theoretical understanding and praxis of education. While, at the beginning of the 21st century, capitalism has penetrated every aspect of our lives and every corner of the world, educational theory in the last two decades has moved away from understanding the relationship between labour, capital and education. Today, this complex relationship is reduced to language games, discursive constructions, and cultural and identity formations. If in the past, economic determinists were guilty of reducing the world to economic categories that shared nothing with Marx's concept of capital as “social relations,” contemporary post-structural theorists and advocates of linguistic, cultural and discursive determinism are equally guilty of saying farewell to capitalism, exploitation, and alienation. Allman's theorizing is distinguished from both types of reductionism by her dialectical approach to the exercise of power by capitalism, and the possibility of challenging it through conscious intervention.

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