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An Introduction***

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Abstract

This essay examines so-called Right-to-Work (RTW) laws as a nearly seventy-year-old push by the capitalist state machine to not only dislodge restrictions on capital's ability to increase the rate of exploitation of labor power as one of many measures to counter falling rates of profit, but as an attack on communism as well. This focus is markedly different from the analysis generally offered by the educational Left in the U.S., which tends to focus exclusively on the privatization of public education and the devastating restrictions on public sector unions as attacks on the public sphere and democracy. These notions suggest that neoliberal policies can be rolled back for a kinder, more egalitarian capitalism.

The analysis articulated within this essay is therefore based on the assumption that the struggle against RTW should be understood, expressed, and engaged as part of the global, anti-capitalist movement itself. In the process, following Lenin more directly, the case is made that the only realistic way to defeat capitalism is through an organized movement, or through the Party form (i.e. a communist party). Within this discussion I point to some of the ways Lenin's discussion on the communist party offers pedagogical insights. Finally, this essay does not provide a systematic analysis of Lenin or RTW, but rather offers an introductory discussion.

Keywords: political economy, policy analysis, neoliberalism, critical theory/pedagogy

Right-to Work Propaganda and Lenin's Communistic Optic

If you are working on a degree in the education field, or any number of social services, your future will likely entail joining a public sector union. Such unions not only come with certain protections and benefits, but they also tend to set high standards of pay and working conditions for non-unionized workers. However, it is not just unions or their achievements that is of particular importance to Lenin concerning what we might call a communist pedagogy. Rather, it is the effect of the process of those victories, such as strikes, on workers' collective consciousness. Reflecting on the tendency of unionized shops to reduce the rate of exploitation within both specific branches of industry and within the space of a region or town, Lenin (1924/1970) notes:

See what a tremendous effect strikes have both on the strikers themselves and on the workers at neighboring or nearby factories or at factories in the same industry... Workers of neighboring factories gain renewed courage when they see that their comrades have engaged themselves in struggle. (p. 62)

This tendency to radicalize is the result of workers sharpening their awareness of the true nature of the relationship between themselves as labor power and the capitalist and its state as personified capitalist. That is, the relationship is one of the oppressed and oppressor or the exploited and exploiter, which cannot be reformed, but only destroyed and replaced. In other

words, because labor power is the only commodity endowed with a self-expansive property, the capitalist as such, as augments of capital, cannot exist without exploiting labor power. Without the exploitation of labor power, on an extending and deepening scale, the capitalist does not exist because no new capital will have been created. This insight leads the workers to gain a collective consciousness that their true class enemy is the capitalist class. This, of course, is our first insight into understanding why unions – these legal assemblies of workers – are, and have been since their emergence, under attack. However, unions in the U.S. are still being barraged despite having been terrorized by the capitalists’ private and public militia and police forces, ideological machine, and legal apparatus. Consequently, the labor movement in the U.S. has been beaten and duped into largely abandoning its former militancy. However, a new generation of teacher and professor union radicals are returning unions to their necessary militant past (Wiener, 2015). This new/old social movement model of unionism, outlined by Lois Wiener (2015), is beginning to challenge the official position of many public and private sector unions in the U.S. thereby challenging the bourgeois myth that harmony between labor and capital is possible (Lenin, 1912/1970).

Many teachers’ and faculty unions today, in response to the trend of cutting state education budgets, still continue to argue that creating more educated workers enables individual states to attract employers offering “better” jobs, thereby bolstering their local economies. However, if economists are correct that nearly eighty percent of all new jobs that will be created in the U.S. in the next twenty years will be low skill-level service-oriented minimum-wage jobs (Marsh, 2011), then these unions, whether they realize it or not, are contributing to competition between workers for a scarcity of well-paying jobs (i.e. between states). The competition for a reduced number of manufacturing jobs due to technological advancements and greater access to foreign labor markets has led states to a race-to-the-bottom. Ultimately, the competition has spawned special tax breaks for corporations leaving communities with depleted public coffers. This contributes to the cutting of school budgets, the deterioration of school districts, and the opening up of schooling as a market service that is publicly funded. There is little evidence in the U.S. that unions are adequately challenging this competition between workers instigated by capital’s current dominance and manipulation over the market in labor. That is, the organization of the economy around exchange value at the expense of use value.

While Marx (1866/1990) recognizes that capitalism fosters an unavoidable competition between workers, “trades’ unions originally sprang up from the spontaneous attempts of workmen at removing or at least checking that competition” (p. 33). The fact that working conditions and the power of unions have deteriorated to such an extent that many of them betray the spirit from which they originally sprang, is further evidence that a Marxist-Leninist intervention is needed. Again, the developing social movement model of teacher unionism is evidence that a new communist movement is developing in the U.S. (and well beyond).

Of course, the situation of trade unions consenting to both the competition between workers and the myth of fairness within capital, and the fact that the capitalist state machine continues its relentless attacks against unions, despite this long legacy of accommodation to the reification of wage labor, is not new. In other words, workers’ unions have been targeted at every stage in capitalism’s historical development, even when they capitulate to the demands of capital. If the trades’ unions are currently not an immediate threat to capital by radicalizing workers, they are always a potential threat, and they always stand as a barrier, of more or less effectiveness, to capital’s ability to freely increase the rate of exploitation. Workers’ unions continue to hold the greatest potential of realizing labor’s potential to become its collective

communist opposite organized together, across unions, and across nations, through the party form.

Perhaps the biggest threat to the ongoing existence of public (as opposed to private) sector labor unions in the U.S., outside of their accommodationism or opportunism, are so called *Right-To-Work* (RTW) laws, which have been passed in 25 states. Because RTW laws prevent unions from employing fair share dues (explained below), membership in public sector unions in RTW states has declined significantly, degrading the ability of workers to collectively defend their professions, working conditions, and quality of life. What I argue below is that RTW laws reduce workers' collective, material, and concrete power as a result of states enacting laws, made possible, in part, from the employment of bourgeois ideology through schooling and the mass media, that spreads disinformation about the true nature of trades' unions.

While recent national anti-labor momentum has propelled RTW into the spotlight across the U.S., it is not widely known that the first RTW laws were actually passed in the mid and late 1940s in Florida, Arkansas, and Texas. Unsurprisingly, the history of RTW has deep racist roots fueled by anti-communist and race-mixing propaganda. In the 1930s Vance Muse, a Texan capitalist, began conceptualizing anti-union legislation informed not only by his desire to retain the high rates of exploitation unions threatened, but also by his deep belief in White supremacy. Muse reasoned that unions foster a form of comradeship between White and Black workers, which led to race mixing and coalition building. He correctly viewed communism as anti-racist, but as a racist himself, this was not viewed as progressive, but as threatening. Thus, while some unions, such as the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) began to adopt anti-racist positions ahead of federal policy; other unions, such as the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), were strongly internationalist and anti-racist. Muse's position on race was reflected the history of organized labor where histories of discriminatory practices kept Black and Brown workers as well as women out of their organizations.

The racism of American unions was so entrenched that even as recent as the 1960s, teachers' unions in New York City resisted a working-class, African American movement for community control of the curriculum. The teachers went as far as blocking entrances to particular schools to prevent African American students from entering. The unions' move was interpreted as another example of the racism of White teachers operating as an external, bourgeois force in Black communities (Kohl, 1999; Perlstein, 1999). However, from a capitalist perspective, unions were still the representation of the White working class.

It is no coincidence that the RTW movement emerged in the U.S. during the Great Depression when massive unemployment, poverty, starvation, and general immiseration led to the radicalization of U.S. workers and the explosion of the numbers of workers joining socialist and communist parties (Becker, 2015; Parenti, 1997). For example, in 1929 the Communist Party USA had eight thousand members. A decade later, toward the end of the Great Depression, the party swelled to over one hundred thousand members. This coincided with massive increases in trades unions, which occurred more than sixty years before Fair Share, now being threatened in states such as Pennsylvania by so-called "Paycheck Protection" legislation. Lenin (1924/1970) explained the logic of working-class momentum as infectious. He noted the rise of radicalization amongst workers when "...study circles and associations become more widespread among them and more workers become socialists" (p. 63). The dispersion of radicalism certainly took place during the Great Depression, which brought on deadly state repression aimed at destroying and demonizing socialism in the U.S. Just as unions lead to

strikes, victories such as higher wages and the potential for subsequent radicalization led to an attack against unions. Accordingly, the focus of anti-union organizations became increased exploitation and reduced wages. Most damaging to union progress was the attack and demonization on the party as well as a movement to downplay capitalism. A necessary component of the communist movement, unions required that capitalism be the center of the global proletariat's revolution.

Lenin reminds us that it is when workers become class conscious and begin to organize, strike, and thus flex their collective strength that they start to realize that the state is a tool of capital and its laws tend to be designed to serve their interests. In this way Lenin (1924/1970) describes the strike as "a school of war" (p. 65). This conceptualization of change within Marx's Hegelian dialectic is seen as developmental. Lenin adopts a Marxist pedagogy of becoming, where new conditions can only emerge *directly* from, and not *separate* from, old ones (Malott & Ford, 2015). That is, by describing the strike as a school, Lenin draws upon the workers' collective ability for learning and creating a knowledge base needed to transform capitalism into socialism. Lenin's (1924/1970) insights are instructive:

Every strike strengthens and develops in the workers the understanding that the government is their enemy and that the working class must prepare itself to struggle against the government for the peoples' rights. Strikes, therefore, teach the workers to unite; they show them that they can struggle against the capitalists only when they are united; strikes teach the workers to think of the struggle of the whole working class against the whole class of factory owners and against the arbitrary, police government. This is the reason that socialists call strikes "a school of war," a school in which the workers learn to make war on their enemies for the liberation of the whole people, all of who labor, from the yoke of government officials and from the yoke of capital. (p. 65)

While this insight is crucial in understanding the development of working class critical consciousness, Lenin (1924/1970) critiqued the tendency of trades' unions, and even some socialists, to believe that full emancipation can be achieved for workers in capitalism through the strike. For this reason, Lenin (1924/1970) is clear that while the strike might be a *school of war*, it is not a *war itself*. That is, the strike must be conceptualized as a tool to not only enhance the material conditions of workers' lives, but it must be strategically employed to increase the number of class conscious workers as a way to seize state power and socialize the means of production. To this end, the economy is organized and planned around meeting workers' needs rather than augmenting capital (i.e. perpetually expanding capital). The workers' school consciously forged in the practice of organizing and carrying out a strike. In practice a strike can be defined as the collective refusal of workers to work thereby abruptly stopping the bringing together of variable capital (i.e. labor power) and constant capital (i.e. raw materials and machinery) in the production of commodities, including both physical items such as books, and immaterial services such as teaching and waiting tables in a restaurant. In other words, this refusal to labor blocks the process of extracting surplus labor time from laborers, which is the sole incentive the capitalist has for entering the labor market as purchaser of this unique human commodity. In fact, the consumption of human labor power is the only way the capitalist can expand his money and create new value, and thus the only way the capitalist can exist as such. Refusing to work retards the capitalist's ability to exist as such, self-expansively. Only when the conflict is resolved can the capitalist continue the self-expansive process. Again, because of the importance of human labor power to the capitalist, the state is controlled by capital to discipline

this human, and thus always potentially rebellious, source of capital's self-expansion. For the communist, the purpose is spreading working class, revolutionary consciousness—consciousness is necessary because the experience of exploitation alone is not enough to develop a scientific understanding of the capitalistic process of perpetually expanding capital, the heart and internal drive of bourgeois society. Such insights are crucial because they challenge the bourgeois myth that the exchange between labor and capital is fair, or ever could be fair. If some degree or rate of exploitation is a requirement for capitalism to exist, then it becomes clear that it is, by definition, impossible to ever strike a fair agreement between labor and capital. The only path to justice is therefore to transform capitalist production relations into socialist ones. The strike as the school of war, therefore, has as its purpose the creation of the communist party, and the purpose of the party is also to engage the war against the capitalist class, the ultimate establishment of the workers' state, and the management of the planned economy—planned for the purpose of meeting human needs, rather than planned for the management of the market and for the maintenance of the capitalist class as is the case within the capitalist state. Rather than repressing the self-determination of oppressed nations, both inside and outside of imperialist states, the workers' state represses the old capitalist class from exploiting and oppressing workers.

Again, the state's attack on unions is both done to prevent short-term gains in wages, but also to subvert the long-term goal of overthrowing capitalism in general. It is within this context that we can best understand the passage of the Taft-Hartley anti-labor legislation that mandated unions use their own resources to defend all workers, even those workers who did not pay union dues (Kahlenberg & Marvit, 2012). This law has led to the disempowerment of public sector unions in states that have passed RTW laws by draining their economic base (i.e. the collection of fair share compulsory union dues). As a result of this legislation, fourteen states passed RTW laws by 1947. In 1961, even as Martin Luther King Jr. spoke out against RTW laws, his commitment to the equal treatment of all workers moved him further and further toward the rational conclusion of anti-capitalism, (Kahlenberg & Marvit, 2012).

On average, workers in states that have adopted RTW laws earn close to six thousand dollars less a year than workers in states without such laws (Kahlenberg & Marvit, 2012). In addition, RTW states spend nearly three thousand dollars less per student for elementary and secondary education than free bargaining states (Kahlenberg & Marvit, 2012). The record of workplace safety is considerably worse in RTW states as well. For example, the rate of workplace deaths in RTW states is nearly fifty three percent higher than in fair share states (Kahlenberg & Marvit, 2012). Consequently, RTW is not only economically devastating and disempowering, but it can also be deadly. States with 'normally' functioning unions with less interference of RTW laws also have better records of keeping racialized compensation discrimination at bay. For example, RTW states pay Latino/a workers fifty percent less and African American workers nearly thirty percent less, on average, as compared to states without RTW (Kahlenberg & Marvit, 2012). These differences in compensation and workers' treatment echo the previous discussion on racist capitalists and their indignation towards people of color.

Since the U.S. Supreme Court has decided to take on the case of RTW through the *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association* case, the threat of the whole capitalists' state machine, could have negative consequences for current students' future earning power—especially teachers, social workers, nurses, and other graduates who will seek employment in commonly unionized public-sector occupations. The petitioners in the *Friedrichs* case are supported by the conservative legal collective, the Center for Individual Rights. If RTW passes

at the federal level, public sector unions across the country, and the workers they represent, will be threatened. Consequently, public sector unions across the country are currently ramping up their membership drives attempting to restore and reenergize the old spirit of union militancy and commitment. In today's anti-labor, anti-union conservative climate, this is an uphill battle, but an indispensable one. Individuals who are a part of public sector unions are therefore joining multiple organizations' effort to build collective power. Current trends are also accompanied by many teachers and professors engaging with Marx and Lenin. While the internal tendencies and dynamics of capital are counter-intuitive, complex, and vastly more expansive than is typically assumed; the conclusion that the only real path to more permanent stability and human fulfillment is through the success of the party's establishment of a communist state and a use-value-led economy, is more readily apparent. In other words, capitalism is an economy designed to maximize profit, thereby focusing on commodity's exchange value, which often compromises their use value or useful effect. For example, turning education into a profit-making enterprise has led to a situation where its useful effect has been through many tactics such as the development of labor saving technologies like online education. A focus on use-value, on the other hand, directs production toward the maximization of *use* with no regard for profit because exploitation has no use according to human (i.e. socialist) values. Examining RTW laws a little more closely offers an even more concrete understanding.

As previously suggested, RTW laws subvert labor unions from safeguarding themselves against workers refusing to pay their dues, often the result of employee intimidation tactics and the aforementioned multi-generation long anti-union propaganda campaign. According to RTW advocates (i.e. propagandists), forcing workers to pay union dues is an attack on "personal freedom," but because unions are obligated by law to represent all workers regardless of if they join the union or not, the National Labor Relations Board allows unions to negotiate safeguards against freeloaders and intimidation.

For example, if your union negotiates a contract, and you receive healthcare benefits, others who work there should also have to pay their fair share to support the work that brought you those benefits. The logic is simple: all workers in an organized shop should pay their union dues because all workers benefit from the union in terms of wages, benefits and legal protections. What is less known, however, are Lenin's (1924/1970) insights regarding the strategic role of unions in pushing for the complete emancipation of labor from the *yoke of capital*. The most common critiques directed at RTW, for example, lack an analysis of capitalism itself, and therefore suggest that the role of unions is to maintain a perpetual harmony between labor and capital. Again, ignored is the deepening crisis within capitalism itself, and the need and possibility of a communist alternative. As previously argued, the unstillable drive to expand capital cannot be content with a bourgeois model of labor unions, and therefore will not rest until unions are gone completely.

It is within this anti-union context that the ceaseless barrage of assaults constantly emerges. To illustrate, a common myth about unions, such as teacher unions, is that they protect bad teachers. In reality, however, teachers' unions protect the due process by which faculty members are evaluated and then retained or fired. Teacher unions ensures those in power do not arbitrarily dismiss workers. Consequently, rather than posing a challenge to capital, unions tend to function to maintain the appearance of a harmonious relationship between labor and capital. This might be considered one of the contradictions of capitalism. That is, the capitalist impulse will target any barrier to profit, even labor organizations that ultimately maintain capitalist legitimacy. Capitalists also tend to oppose unions not because they are anti-capitalist, but

because they are obstacles to unfettered exploitation. Another common myth is that unions are driven solely by self-interest. In reality, teachers and faculty unions, for example, have a long history of advocating for student needs by defending the mission of providing working people an affordable, high quality public education (Perlstein, 1999). This purpose of unions is also not inherently antithetical to capitalism, but has actually proven useful to capital. With the rise of the educational marketplace, public education is now a barrier to educational capitalists who have a direct economic incentive to privatize public education.

If RTW laws were genuinely informed by the true class interests of wage earners, then you would expect the initiative to have emerged from workers themselves—this is not the case. One of the primary groups advocating for anti-union measures is the National Right to Work Committee (NRTWC). Some of the more well-known contributors to the NRTWC are the Koch family, the Walton Family Foundation, and the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), which have gained a reputation for throwing millions of dollars behind anti-labor efforts (Kahlenberg & Marvit, 2012). Among their initiatives, the NRTWC has spent over \$33 million since 1999 lobbying the U.S. Congress (Kahlenberg & Marvit, 2012). Demonstrating their true class interests, the NRTWC lobbied against the Employee Free Choice Act, which would have made it easier for workers to organize, while supporting initiatives that would reduce the power of the National Labor Relations Board over employers.

Again, unions have historically protected worker safety, advocated for benefits like sick days, and supported employment conditions that we all take for granted, like the concept of the weekend. Importantly, unions have allowed workers an ability to strike, which, as Lenin argued, are necessary for the development of class consciousness and proletarian revolutions. However, as suggested above, unions can also serve more reactionary, counter-revolutionary purposes. Understood in the context of growing poverty, suffering, and imperialist aggression of the contemporary era, Lenin's insights regarding trade unions and the building of the anti-capitalist socialist party is indispensable.

Rising Poverty and *The Party*

As RTW legislation advances, and as attacks on workers extends, the conditions for wage labor continues to deteriorate. With the expanding degradation of workers, as we will see below, the frequency of spontaneous uprisings increases, and with them, the potential for communist organizing and communist revolution becomes more fertile. However, this potential is not likely to materialize without conscious, socialist intervention. Lenin (1924/1970), therefore, describes one of the primary purposes of *the party* as increasing the number of socialist workers:

...In order to make the working-class cause known to the masses of workers and to acquaint them with socialism and the working-class struggle. This is a task the socialists and class-conscious workers must undertake jointly by organizing a socialist working-class party for this purpose. (p. 66)

The task of the socialist party to challenge counter-revolutionary measures of the state is measured by several realities: increased poverty, a widening wealth gap, elitism and excess, and the antagonism between labor and capital. However, this is not to suggest that short-term reforms that alleviate some of this suffering should be rejected. On the contrary, any achievable reform, such as the current movement, led by fast food workers, for increasing the minimum wage to fifteen dollars an hour, should be supported. Marx (1866/1990) noted that “this activity of the trades’ unions is not only legitimate, it is necessary” (p. 34). The task of the unions in this

context is therefore to “...look carefully after the interests of the worst-paid trades” in order to “...convince the world at large that their efforts, far from being narrow and selfish, aim at the emancipation of the downtrodden millions” (Marx, 1866/1990, p. 35).

Marx (1867/1967), of course, understood all too well the larger context these struggles have been situated in. As predicted, the world has increasingly been divided into two oppositional class camps – the capitalist class on one side and the working class on the other. The task of the communist and of the class-conscious trades’ unions is, therefore, to agitate toward the unification of the worlds’ workers, which entails being sensitive to not only the similarities between workers, but their differences as well. For example, in a recent essay, Dave Hill, Christine Lewis, Alpesh Maisuria, Patrick Yarker, and Julia Carr (2015) note that in the aftermath of the 2007 recession, the rich in Britain are 64% richer and the poor are 54% poorer. Similarly, in the U.S., the amount of total wealth going to the top 1% has more than doubled since 1979. Of course, such growing inequality not only disrupts the lives of workers, but it is disruptive to capitalism itself—one of the many counter-intuitive laws or tendencies of the capitalist system.

Honing in on the contradictory tendency of how the process of capitalist production leads to the growing immiseration of laborers is also disruptive to the process of capitalist production by disrupting realization. Hill et al. (2015) cites an acknowledgment by the International Monetary Fund noting the negative consequences of income inequality on “account deficits.” What this refers to is one of the central contradictions of capital that Marx (1992) outlines in the second volume of *Capital*. That is, the central drive of capital to expand accumulation on an unlimited extending scale, manifesting in efforts to push down wages below what is socially necessary, resulting in the premature exhaustion and death of the laborer unless regulated by the state or slowed down or stopped by working class resistance, will lead to periodic disruptions in realization because of the negative effects on workers’ ability to access and consume articles of their daily need. When the capitalist returns to the market as a seller of goods and services, but is unable to find a sufficient number of workers entering the market as buyers of products to meet their immediate and leisurely consumer needs, the circuit of capital is not completed and crisis ensues. In other words, as wages are driven down through a multitude of mechanisms from anti-trade union legislation, to labor-saving technology and intensification, to the export of capital and imperialist expansionism, laborers’ socially necessary access to the consumption fund is subverted, and if a welfare system is not in place, rebellion will likely ensue. Increasing the credit economy and creating new markets in luxury goods, for example, have temporarily displaced such crises.

As global capitalism continues to descend into deepening crisis, imperialist countries, such as the U.S. and Britain, also continue their attacks on public education. Many teacher and faculty unions argue that investing in public education makes economic sense. By ensuring that local school districts and universities are properly funded, local economies are directly supported. So how should this be understood beyond my previous discussion on competition? Are capitalists just not smart enough to see the obvious? I think there are many interrelated answers to this conundrum. First, the aforementioned education capitalists have a direct interest in turning the public against publicly controlled education, so they can take control of the tax monies appropriated for public education in order to attempt to make a profit off of them. Second, technological developments have changed capital’s needs in terms of the level of education or skill-level of laborers. However, there is much more to this story than what first appears.

To provide an example from the nineteenth century, the advent of the machine factory in the mid-1800s, shifted the knowledge base of workers to command the tools of industry. For the first time in history, the workers did not control the means of production, but the machines controlled the workers. In the place of the artificial divisions of labor created by manufacture, stepped the natural division of age and sex. Where the skill level required by industry was lowered, and the efficiency of production was greatly enhanced, rather than freeing workers from labor as they reproduced the value of their own existence in a much shorter time, this revolution in production was used by capital to extend the length of the workday beyond its natural limits and increase the immiseration and degradation of the laborer to new levels of barbarity. The previous leverage the workers had in advocating for better wages, embodied in the necessary knowledge they possessed concerning the operation of their tools, was swept away. The resulting suffering and debasement led to a new militancy and movement for socialism from the U.S. to England and beyond. It was within this context of increased alienation and intellectual degradation that mass schooling emerged. Thus, common schooling emerged not because capitalists needed more educated workers, but because they were convinced education could be employed to create more obedient workers adding another front of struggle in their fight against communism.

As poverty and suffering escalate in the U.S., and as U.S. imperialism dominates, it is not surprising that we are witnessing a renewed emphasis on flag education and blind patriotism. But what is happening in the schools where we have witnessed recent rebellions such as Ferguson and Baltimore? Are teachers joining the movement? Are radical teachers being marginalized? Are there ramped up efforts to pacify Black and Brown students in these oppressed communities? We know that in Baltimore there is currently a proposal to cut funding to the city's schools by 35 million dollars, where schools are already 2000 dollars per pupil below what the state says is adequate. The proposed cuts put 400 teachers and 700 support staff in jeopardy of losing their jobs (Campbell, 2015). If national trends are any indication, these proposed cuts were already in the works before the uprising. The question, however, is what effects might the ongoing rebellion have on who or what gets cut?

Of course, the larger context is a capitalist economy whose changing composition is driven by such factors as military intervention, the imperialist export of capital, and the digital advancements in the machine factory, which are leading to a situation where capital requires smaller pools of skilled and unskilled laborers. As always, who wins and who loses, or who loses first and the most, is racially mediated. While education is being downgraded in this context, patriotic education and ideological management, as mentioned above, is being enhanced. The role of the socialist educator is therefore to intervene in both the classroom and in teachers' and professors' unions. Lenin's work and legacy, which has only been briefly addressed in this short essay, should take center stage among today's communist pedagogues.

The Communist Challenge

Lenin's communist challenge here is for trade unionists and radicalized workers (including teachers) to resist and expose bourgeois unionism. In his comments on the rising tide within the U.S. working class for socialism, as opposed to an accommodationist trade unionism, Lenin (1912/1970) made the communist position absolutely clear:

Strange as it may seem, in capitalist society even the working class can carry on a bourgeois policy, if it forgets about its emancipatory aims, puts up with wage-slavery

and confines itself to seeking alliances now with one bourgeois party, now with another, for the sake of imaginary “improvements” in its indentured condition. (p. 231)

For example, the push within much of the educational left within the U.S. for expanding the public sphere or the democratic impulse and resisting neoliberalism, while informed by the best of intentions, leave the underlying cause unaddressed. And that is, of course, the true spirit and intent of capital itself. Marx’s (1867/1967) metaphor of the werewolf remains a powerful way to begin understanding this spirit and intent. The capitalist drive to accumulate as much surplus value as possible will always lead to the premature death and exhaustion of the laborer. Unless, that is, the rate of exploitation is regulated by the state through restrictions such as minimum wage laws or minimized by working class resistance through such tactics as the strike. When capital is deregulated and the power of trades’ unions is restricted through RTW laws, the true spirit and intent of capital will always surface, as is currently happening throughout the world. Like the werewolf, who always emerges given the proper conditions (i.e. a full moon), so too will the barbarism of capital emerge given proper conditions (i.e. the deregulation of capital or the restriction of the trades’ unions and the destruction of workers’ states). Lenin therefore insisted that the role of the communist party is to educate all workers of the true nature of capitalism and thus the only path to full emancipation, which is the revolutionary transformation of capitalist relations to socialist ones.

Given the unreformable characteristic of capital as well as its current ascendancy, we can expect greater frequency of spontaneous uprisings and rebellions, desperate acts of random violence, and monstrous perversions of humanity. If an organized anti-racist progressive movement does not take a leadership role in the frustrated bursts of outrage, then uprisings and hate crimes will surely increase with frequency. Even more, potential opportunities for progress will be missed and white supremacist groups could strengthen their foothold taking leadership of disenfranchised poor Whites.

In this context of uncertainty, oppression, exploitation, and contradiction, organized communist struggle also seems to be growing. The resistance is developing not only outside of the U.S., but within the U.S. as well. With the Soviet Union unfortunately gone, and the bigotry of anti-communism in the U.S. slowly dissipating, a new socialist and anti-capitalist movement is taking hold. Despite some significant socialist critiques of the Occupy movement and the presidential campaign for Vermont senator Bernie Sanders, these moments of resistance and support have been contextualized as harbingers of reform.

In the context of teachers’ unions, the recent strike of the Seattle Education Association (SEA) sent shock waves across the country and embodies the spirit of the largely forgotten history of socialism in the U.S. (Hoop, 2015; Le, 2015). That is, the Seattle teachers’ strong connection and solidarity with students, their care givers, and other unions gave the SEA strength, leverage, and unprecedented concessions to remove the “Student Growth Rating” clause that links teacher evaluations to student test scores. The SEA was also able to achieve the establishment of 30 “race and equity teams” charged with identifying examples of institutional racism and recommending ways to address them. It is not perfect, but it is a great beginning. The Seattle Education Association’s concrete support and victory for these and other social justice issues might be viewed as another harbinger of what is to come, and a reminder of what workers can win through the collective organizing and strategic leadership. What might these movements signify for the future? It means we have to fight harder than we ever have. It means we have to be more disciplined and organized than we ever have. It means we have to be

smarter than we ever have. It means we have to be fiercer and more committed than we ever have. The future is not guaranteed, by any means. While it may be hard to imagine, things could take a turn for the worse, and it is up to us to ensure they do not. Now is the time to put our academic pride and egos to the side and join a movement for socialism (i.e. a party), and get involved.

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