

## The State

According to orthodox Marxism—with its juridical, military, police, and educational powers—in a capitalist society, the dominant classes use the state as an instrument for the social control of subordinate classes. In Marxist-Leninist theory, the state apparatus taken over by the proletariat would be used to ensure the working classes consolidation of power and control. Eventually, when all classes had disappeared and the society was classless, the state, as an instrument of the domination of one class over another, would wither away. However, in the historical reality of the Soviet system, the state, especially under Stalin, became an instrument of totalitarian repression. Schools, as agencies of the Soviet state, transmitted an academically rigid Communist Party line.

Some theorists who continue to subscribe to Marx's basic theories have revised them. These revisionist Marxists are called Neo-Marxists. In contemporary Neo-Marxism, the role of the state in a capitalist society is more complex. While generally reinforcing the hegemony of the dominant class, the state, especially its legislative and judicial branches, acts as an arena of class conflict. Under Neo-Conservatives, the state would encourage and sponsor market-driven educational programs. It would frame its educational agenda in terms of increasing economic productivity, as occurred in the wake of the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 with the Reagan administration. However, Liberals also view the state as an arena in which social movements and forces seek to implement their agendas.

## MARXIST EDUCATIONAL THEORY

Karl Marx was primarily a social, economic, and political, rather than an educational, theorist. His general ideology has had a significant impact on modern history.

Marx believed that the task of a genuine education, based on the principles of scientific socialism that he developed, required the exposure and eradication of "false consciousness" from the minds of the proletariat. False consciousness was the product of a dominant class ideology, which was imposed on and accepted by the subordinate class. For example, the ruling class will claim that its political and economic principles are universally true; schools should transmit these general universal truths and values to the young.<sup>9</sup> For Marx, these dominant class principles were a form of ideological brainwashing in capitalist schooling.

Contemporary Neo-Marxists, taking a broader perspective than orthodox Marxists, see capitalism as a cultural as well as an economic system.<sup>10</sup> Capitalist culture, reflected in schools and other social institutions, becomes hegemonic as the dominant group imposes its ideology on subordinate groups. In addition to analyzing economic conditions, they examine how schools have

reproduced ideological, social, and political relationships that reflect dominant group interests.

Speculative philosophies such as Idealism and Thomism, like religion, contributed to the false consciousness of the proletariat, according to Marx. Realism, especially its scientific variety, could be used to gain an accurate picture of reality when incorporated with Marxist dialectical materialism. Ideologies such as Liberalism and Conservatism were also part of the defensive armor of dominant groups to control subordinate ones. Certain aspects of Utopian Socialism, Marx believed, provided a useful analysis but a muddle-headed strategy for social change. Thus, Marx saw part of his task as consigning the philosophies and ideologies that contributed to false consciousness to the trash heap of history.

In a world that was purged of false philosophies, Marx's ideology, which he called "scientific socialism" or Communism, could be used to establish a revolutionary consciousness in the working class. The vanguard of the proletariat, a revolutionary elite, could educate the working class to their true interests. The purpose of education, for Marx, was to put revolutionary theory into practice. Theory, arising from an analysis of concrete historical events and movements, was to be the basis for the strategy of the revolution and the coming classless society. By adhering to these revolutionary guidelines, the proletariat would be victorious.

Marxist educational theory arises from a conception of the human being as a natural person whose social nature is based on the means and modes of economic production. Human beings, particularly the proletariat, need to be imbued with the materialist concept of consciousness. *Marx - a Marxist!*

Marx envisioned schooling, or formal instruction, as consisting of both intellectual and physical development, as well as technological, or polytechnical, training, which was to introduce the young to productive processes.

Industrial, or polytechnical, education was to be more than the occupational specialization of the capitalist system. It was to be a means of reducing the alienation of workers from their labor and its product. Polytechnical education was to be a generalized industrial preparation that, by combining theory and practice, prepared a person to perform a variety of work and to understand the meaning of economically produced social change.

*Like Utopians*

## NEO-MARXISM'S EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

In addition to theorists who adhere to orthodox Marxism, there are those who have modernized Marxism for use as an analytical instrument. These Neo-Marxists, who have modified and revised classical Marxist theory, have examined the process of schooling in capitalist society. Like most educational ideologies and theories, Neo-Marxism contains a general frame of reference derived from Marxism. It also contains, however, differing reinterpretations of Marxist ideology.<sup>11</sup>

In the section that follows, we will examine selected concepts from the Neo-Marxist critique.

Like their orthodox Marxist kindred, Neo-Marxists are conflict theorists in that they see society and its institutions as the scene of struggle between contending groups for power, prestige, and social dominance.<sup>12</sup> For them, cultural conflict involves (1) class and class culture, (2) the distribution of power between classes, (3) the social control of one class by another, and (4) the use of schools by the dominant class to control subordinate classes. For the Neo-Marxists, schools, like other institutions, are designed to serve and advance the interests of the dominant class.

Neo-Marxist educational theorists have analyzed the role of schools in culturally reproducing the dominant capitalist culture. They see the curriculum, both overt and hidden, methodology, and testing as representing the dominance of one group over another. Neo-Marxists see a deliberate connection between the curriculum and instruction and the larger society. They believe that the symbols and meanings filtered into the capitalist schools' curricula shape, confirm, and maintain the dominant class ideology. In a capitalist society such as the United States, the very location of the school, whether it is in an affluent suburb or in the economically depressed inner city, reflects and reproduces the attitudes and values of the surrounding locality. Within a school setting, the grouping and instructing of students reproduce the social, political, and economic status quo. The school mirrors the essential class divisions of the larger society, and rather than changing them, hardens these divisions by perpetuating them in the young.

Neo-Marxists are also concerned with identifying and analyzing class consciousness, which is the perception of reality, the social outlook, and the values held by a given group or class.<sup>13</sup>

Because Marxists define class on the basis of people's relationships to the means and modes of economic production, class is an economically derived social phenomenon. Schooling in a capitalist society, argue the Marxists, reflects the outlook and values of the dominant or privileged class. Again, it perpetuates these dominant class values by transmitting and inculcating them in the young.

The interests and values of the dominant class will be framed in a context of the common good. For example, the values of respect for private property, the sanctity of contracts, and respect for law and order have long been traditional public school values. According to the Neo-Marxist critique, these traditional values are designed to protect the property of the dominant monied class. By encasing these class-centered values in a framework that extols the common good, the school is bending the minds of the young to accept their society as being the best of all possible worlds.

When a privileged and dominant class has managed to establish its thought-ways and values among subordinate or suppressed classes, it has established ideological control over them.<sup>14</sup> Rather than being a place where ideas contend in an open market, as Liberal apologists assert, the school in a capitalist society,

is closed to alternative viewpoints that may threaten the hegemony that the dominant class enjoys over the lower class, argue the Neo-Marxists. Such hegemony is truly established when members of the lower or subordinate class begin to express the views and to share the values of the dominant class.

Contemporary Neo-Marxists, such as Michael Apple, have revised the bipolar model of class conflict of the more orthodox Marxists who see class conflict as historically destined to occur between two incompatible classes—the capitalists and the proletariat. Apple contends that the class structure within capitalism is more complex than that suggested by orthodox Marxists in the nineteenth century.

Class structure refers to "the organization of social relations" based on class interests. Class formation, which refers to the "organized collectivities" within the structure, is related to economic forces and also to cultural, political, and social patterns and trends.<sup>15</sup> The formation of class cultures is further complicated in racially and ethnically diverse nations such as the United States. In addition to economic conditions, class cultures also reflect racial, ethnic, and gender histories, relationships, and conflicts.<sup>16</sup>

For Neo-Marxists, such as Apple, class, especially in the United States, is conditioned by gender and race as well as economics. Apple argues that seventy percent of working class occupational positions are filled by women and members of minority groups. Thus, an analysis of class formation needs to consider patriarchal and racial dominance themes.<sup>17</sup>

The middle class, with its interest in acquiring technical and managerial information and skills, holds an important place in an advanced capitalist society.<sup>18</sup> The middle class situation rests more on control of cultural reproduction than on economic exploitation. In educational policy, the middle class has its own general ideological orientation but it tends to be fractionalized into those who favor subject-matter competency and economic efficiency, such as the Essentialists, and those who are more progressively inclined to child-centered schooling.

Through their formal curricula and instructional programs, schools prepare the members of the future work force.<sup>19</sup> In establishing and maintaining these programs, a determining element is exercised by those who hold economic power. The economic function of the school is to identify and select those who will occupy the various rungs in the corporate ladder of the capitalist society. It trains people for the specialties that make the division of labor possible. It prepares people to be consumers of the products of a capitalist economy. Based on premises of economic inequality, such schooling is a determinant, albeit a partial one, of the rewards and penalties that its graduates will receive. In effect, it perpetuates the economic inequalities of the society and maintains the status quo.

In a capitalist society, schools reproduce the educational sorting that precedes and accompanies the functional division of labor. Further, they condition the dominated group to accept as legitimate the testing, grouping, and selecting

processes that will make them into subordinate cogs in the corporate-industrial machinery. For example, homogeneous grouping in a capitalist society reproduces socioeconomic phenomena. The reproduction of social strata in the school, allegedly based on academic ability, implies that membership in a particular group or track is determined by an objective and competitive meritocratic system. In reality, Marxists would argue that the identification of a student with a particular track is economically based. Schools reproduce the existing socioeconomic structure and condition students to accept the legitimacy of that structure.

In addition to the overt economic programming done by schools, Neo-Marxist interpreters of education often refer to the hidden curriculum, or the concomitant learning that goes on in a school. According to Michael Apple, the hidden curriculum "reinforces basic rules" regarding conflict and its uses. It establishes a "network of assumptions" that reinforces legitimacy and authority.<sup>20</sup> The hidden curriculum underscores the norms and values of the dominant group in such a pervasive way that challenges to it are rendered illegitimate.

For example, the emphasis on the sanctity of private property can be reinforced as a value by assigning certain school spaces to particular individuals. Punctuality and the efficient use of time are also values reinforced by the school process. These attitudes and values, which are held to be characteristics of the effective school, are also conducive to the functioning of a capitalist economy.

## CONCLUSION

After the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, Marxism became the official ideology in the Soviet Union. Reinterpreted by Lenin, dialectical materialism was the dominant theory in Soviet schools until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990. In the People's Republic of China, Marxism as reinterpreted by Mao ZeDong has been the official ideology. In the Soviet Union, Marxist Leninism was supposed to create the new proletarian Soviet man and woman. Marxist Leninism, the Soviet Communist ideology, has been repudiated in contemporary Russia and the other successor states to the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Also, Marxism, while still the official state ideology in Communist China, has grown theoretically inadequate to explain the course of modernization in that country.

Liberal and Conservative critics of Marxism refer to it as a fallen and failed system. They contend that when Marx's ideas were actually put into practice in the Soviet Union and China, they resulted in an immensely bureaucratic and repressive totalitarian state system, a society imprisoned in a gulag in which human freedom was shackled.

Despite the failure of the Soviet system, Marxism continues to have a pronounced theoretical attraction, especially among some academics. Neo-Marxist educational theorists would contend that neither the Soviet nor the Chinese Com-

munist systems genuinely represented Marx's ideology. Rather, they are likely to say that the Soviet system, especially under Stalin, was a totalitarian state rather than a proletarian society. For Neo-Marxist theorists, Marxism continues to be a highly potent theory which carries with it a high level of analytical power, especially for schools.

Marxism interprets educational goals and schooling, curriculum, and instruction within a primarily economic context. Neo-Marxism, while stressing the economic base of society, politics, and education, moves the analysis into the cultural and political arena.

Regardless of one's ideological position, Karl Marx has to be recognized as formulating a powerful intellectual synthesis of Western thought. Marxist doctrine presents one perspective of analyzing historical, social, and educational forces and trends. Neo-Marxism, a recent theoretical development derived from Marx's theory, is an instrument for analyzing social and educational institutions.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Examine the influences that shaped Karl Marx's ideological perspective.
2. Is Marxism a philosophy or an ideology?
3. Review Chapter 2 on Idealism. Compare and contrast Marxism and Idealism.
4. Review Chapter 13 on Utopianism. Compare and contrast Marxism and Utopianism.
5. Review the Pragmatist view of social change discussed in Chapter 6. Compare and contrast it with the Marxist view.
6. Analyze and provide examples of the Marxist concepts of "false consciousness," "alienation," and "hegemony."
7. Do you consider the Neo-Marxist educational critique to be a useful instrument in analyzing contemporary U.S. schools? Provide a rationale for your answer.
8. Is the collapse of the Soviet Union relevant or irrelevant to discussions of Marxism and Neo-Marxism?

## INQUIRY PROJECTS

- Based on your reading of the chapter, prepare written critiques from a Marxist perspective of Liberalism, Conservatism, and Utopianism.
- Prepare a paper that analyzes the social and educational ideas of a Communist or Marxist leader such as Lenin, Stalin, or Mao ZeDong.
- From a Neo-Marxist perspective, prepare a paper that analyzes U.S. schooling.
- Review the book by Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America*.