

## **Education Versus Schooling as a Commodity Fetish**

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*"...a schoolmaster is a productive labourer when, in addition to belabouring the heads of his scholars, he works like a horse to enrich the school proprietor. That the latter has laid out his capital in a teaching factory, instead of in a sausage factory, does not alter the relation." Marx<sup>1</sup>*

By way of softening up, or seduction, I begin with six very quick stories:

1. I work with quite a few whole language professionals, people who see literacy as a quest for meaning, who oppose the disconnected-from-life habits of "phonics-first," and high-stakes standardized exams.

Over the years, the whole language crowd led the good fight for education, literacy in particular.

Two things trouble me. First, they routinely split education from the sources of social inequality and war: capitalism and imperialism—exploitation and the quest for territory.

In this sense, they adopt a view similar to one of their arch-enemies, Michelle Rhee, the school overseer in the failed District of Columbia system whose reign of fear is well-documented. Here is Rhee speaking to an assembly of principals, scaring them:

"Our responsibility is to deliver the goods, no matter what the situations our students are in. The reform is in the schoolhouse. You are here because we believe you are the right people to deliver this reform. The election is not our concern, the election is not your concern. Go hard or go home!"<sup>2</sup>

*In this context, most whole language professionals cling to the view that schooling and literacy are prime keys to the common good, that literacy and today's schools are inseparable; rejecting out of hand a radical analysis of why things are as they are, or, to the side, why it is that doing school reform without social and economic reform makes no sense. Setting aside that German Nazis and Japanese fascists were literate, this view, which suggests liberal support for public schools, marches them straight into voting booths, seeking shelter from reactionary moves on the schools.<sup>3</sup>*

*Moreover, most members of what is called the Whole Language Umbrella (WLU) embraced the vacillating reactionary Diane Ravitch who, for more than a decade, fought to destroy the careers of WLU members and now, appearing to switch sides, adopts the form of WLU's views, opposing the same high-stakes exams she created and fought for—seated beside the likes of Central*

*Intelligence Agency operatives in the White House--but only to bolster her nationalist project in not-so-new ways. At issue is not so much whether the other side, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) cum Race to the Top (RaTT) backers, would hug a double-crosser seeking entry to the upper echelons of whole language educators as is the question: why are whole language supporters so partial to segmented people and analysis? 4*

*2. At the July 2010 representative assembly of the largest union in the U.S., the National Education Association, 9,000 delegates representing 3.5 million members, overwhelmingly and systematically rejected, refused to discuss, motions against the U.S. empire's wars on the grounds that they were "out of focus," "off point," "not relevant," popularly silencing any real debate about what I see as the abundantly obvious fact that, today, the education agenda is a war agenda--a class war and imperialist war agenda--and has been for some time. When NEA delegates voted down a motion that objected to connecting war funding and school funding, in effect they told elites that school workers are willing to take a bribe in exchange for silence and collaboration about the very ventures that are looting school funding.5*

*3. On March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2010, k-12 and college students, professors and teachers, joined community activists in the most massive strike and action since the immigration rights marches on Mayday, 2006.*

*Initiated in California, the March 4<sup>th</sup> Movement engaged tens of thousands of people in radical action and critique: seizing buildings, shutting down campus entrances, walkouts, teach-ins, rallies, marches, demonstrations all coupled to a consistent, connected, radical analysis that commonly tied together capitalism, racism, imperialist war, inequality, school cuts--as well as the form and substance of schooling.*

*The California leadership then chose to call for another, similar, action on October 7<sup>th</sup>. In the summer of 2010, however, radical students went home. The movement was commandeered by a collection of politicians, union bosses, competing sects and what was the March 4<sup>th</sup> call to "Educate! Agitate! Organize! Occupy! Strike! Teach-in!" and "Stop the Wars and Bailouts! Fund the People!" became a call for a "Day of Action to Defend Public Education," preceded by a series of well-regulated conferences led by the Democratic Party and its union camp followers, and other sects, replete with "Get out the vote" tables.*

*The March 4<sup>th</sup> hijackers decided not to mention capitalism, imperialism, and war in the call for October 7<sup>th</sup> action. We shall see what happens when the students return. I have high hopes.*

*4. This disconnection demonstrates that literacy does not mean literacy. The New Yorker spent a page of expertise explaining that being literate does not translate into financial literacy, "most Americans cannot explain what compound interest is...(almost half surveyed) couldn't answer questions about inflation and interest rates correctly....the less people know, the more they run into trouble." To invert Paulo Freire's notion, reading the word does not mean reading the*

*world. Or, further back, Thoreau: “Most men have learned to read to serve a paltry convenience, as they have learned to cipher in order to keep accounts and not be cheated in trade, but of reading as a noble intellectual exercise they know little or nothing.” 6*

*5. Then, another twist. Teaching in a community college as a joyful retirement discipline, I have a lot of Marines and other military personnel in my classes. Remarkably, we get along very well. We all gain from their classroom comments as well as loans of military magazines. What is striking in the military texts is the officer corps’ profound concern about Afghan illiteracy, lack of time-discipline, and inability to read maps. This means the Afghan Army, which the U.S. empire pretends is key to success, fails a lot. Well-educated imperial U.S. soldiers are extraordinarily frustrated by both their illiterate Taliban opposition, which is winning, and their equally illiterate allies, who are not winning.<sup>7</sup>*

*Why these disconnections, paradoxes, or in the case of the military, interesting inversion?*

*Is it only the military that connects schooling to society? Why?*

*6. Last of the stories: I wrote an article for Counterpunch arguing that public schools are not public all, but segregated schooling within what is now an emerging corporate state, that the education agenda is a war agenda; a class war and empire’s war agenda. In the article, I described in detail why it is that the empire is not a democracy, that the schools are capital’s schools, not ours, and that the call to “Defend Public Education” is not only to defend a myth, but to defend what is going on in those schools (high-stakes exams, merit pay, etc) and to, worse, empower the corporate state even more. I argued for mass, class-conscious resistance inside a society dedicated to war and exploitation.<sup>8</sup>*

*I got dozens of congratulatory emails. Of those, all but five thanked me for opening their eyes about needing to defend public education and, importantly, their jobs. Gad.*

*I know reason alone does not change minds, nor does plucking away one veil of mystification pluck away all veils. However, with stories as seduction, let’s look through the veil of normalcy that makes it so easy to split school and society. Why does this happen?*

*Because education, really schooling, has become a divine fetish in a way similar to how Marx describes commodity fetishism, that is, as an icon that masks real social relations, a disguise to obscure the core issues of our times*

*What are these issues?*

*The core issues of our times are the real promise of perpetual war coupled with accelerating color-coded social and economic inequality met, as noted above, by the potential of mass class conscious activism.*

*If that is true, what is the role of education, or school, in de-industrialized America?*

*Schools are the centripetal organizing point of de-industrialized North American life, and much of life elsewhere. Evidence: School workers, not industrialized workers, are by far the most unionized people in the USA, more than 3.5 million union members. School unions are growing, if slowly, while industrial unions collapse, evaporate, because, in part, industry evaporates, and because industrial union leaders abandoned the heart of unionism—the contradictory interests of workers and employers. There are about 56 million kids in US schools. Nearly one-half of the youth in high school today will be draft-eligible in the next seven years.<sup>9</sup>*

*School involves far more people than the military—a ratio of, directly, about 49 to 1; more than the tax system; more than welfare—school is the center of many family’s lives.*

*In some instances, school is the only safe and stable place a child has. Kids, community people get food and medical care in schools. This is more true now, indicative of social and economic collapses (the family, homelessness, cruel and punishing welfare programs), the harshest elements reserved for those who arrive with the least, women and children, people of color, with razor sharp precision. I am acutely aware of the pathos of one good teacher providing the only safety, shelter, kindness, and in a few cases, food, that a child gets. That, however, only sharpens my point of the relationship of schools, as central organizing points in a decaying society, to social structures.*

*How shall we theorize what is now the real centripetal role of school or education today, and what shall we do about it?*

*As I puzzled about the problems my stories above present, it struck me that to make a metaphorical parallel to Marx’s analysis of capital’s processes and expanding his take on commodity fetishism might be helpful.*

*Consider education (enlightenment, “to lead out”) as something people needed to survive for tens of thousands of years. Think of education as a use value, something that has intrinsic value, like labor or a shovel.*

*Then, think of school as an exchange value, that value which allows education to be commodified through exploitation, as with the exploitation of people or production of shovels for profit.*

*Over time, producing the shovel (school) as a use value is overwhelmed by producing many shovels for profits: exchange values. What had an intrinsic value, the shovel (education), becomes an exploitative relationship (school).*

*Education and school, I say, are different, related but related in a contradictory way. Education is one thing—school another. School is akin to a religious icon designed to conceal real, significant, social relations where, for example, what is actually socially constructed (education) purportedly for the common good, is privately appropriated for selfish ends (school).*

*So, we have this:*

<u>Education</u>	<u>School</u>
<i>Use Value</i>	<i>Exchange Value</i>
<i>Education, a use value, exists without school. School, an exchange value, does not exist without debasing or altering education. School creates a pretense of education while, in fact, producing a mystified form of superficial, anti-radical, knowledge in service to a society rooted in war (class war and imperialist war) and exploitation.</i>	

*There are, assuredly, countervailing forces. Real educators, as well as school workers, teach people important and worthy things in schools, which are, still, more free than most work places. Moreover, the key product of schools is human, not a widget or shovel, coupled with ideas—different from chasing the line in a shovel factory. But at issue is: which side of this contradiction typically, mainly, dominates? I propose that the dominant side in schools is the exchange value side.*

*For example, take the claim that the No Child Left Behind Act, or now the Race to the Top (RaTT) will create social justice by treating all school children equally. Real educators would see, right off, that the equitable treatment of people set up in inequitable social situations, as with parental income and race, will only create deeper inequality—but most of the debate in school circles accepts the bogus premise and moves on from there—splitting school and society. Even more bizarre, the same people who profit from inequality and exploitation, like Bill Gates, are those who claim they can fashion equality via schooling.*

*Other examples of schools as commodity fetishes? Let me count the ways.*

*1. Schools create a simulation of “Public” Education when, in fact, schools are segregated by class and race—serve as organs of the capitalist state. Nevertheless, school workers, many students, and the public, have an idolatrous vision of what school is, confuse it with education—although, again, education and school are necessarily related. Yes, indeed, it is good to teach people to read, and to radically read to discover why things are as they are—and what to do. But the form of literacy is lost in substantive reality. History, for example, is largely eradicated in school, abolished to the point that historian and political scientist Chalmers Johnson says “Americans cannot connect cause and effect.” 10*

*A gentle fog, however, settled over the difference between education and schooling. Now, most people see them as one in the same. The school industry, following Marx’s metaphorical turn*

*into the mystical world, are missions for capitalism and school workers its missionaries. The deeply held idea that there is an “education family,” in which all are together in the same boat with all, helps create pacified areas where people become willing, if unwitting, instruments of their own oppression.*

*2. Behind a haze of school boards, bond issues, votes, etc., schools give the capitalist state, today an armed weapon and executive committee of diverse wings of the ruling classes, a veneer of legitimacy, neutrality (note the bank bailouts, the auto bailouts, the endless wars for empire where children of the poor fight other children of the poor on behalf of the rich in their homelands). It is not to their credit that most teachers unthinkingly see themselves as agents as that government, don’t even feel the ambivalence of serving the obvious needs of the children in front of them against the demands of the state (this has not always been so; not everywhere—as with Russian teachers who played important roles in the 1905 and 1917 revolutions—but, sad to say, it has been largely true over time as with German and Japanese fascist volunteer teachers).<sup>11</sup>*

*3. Schools seem to be a natural, a-historical, form of human existence when they are utterly unnatural and serve, for example, to strip children of what David Harvey sees as their inherent sense of dialectics.<sup>12</sup>*

*4. As instruments of the demands of the system of capital, schools fashion command over time so successfully that students and teachers internalize that subservience to another’s clock.*

*5. Schools and teachers refashion the next generation of workers and warriors, all reproducing, for the most part, their birth-station in life. Tragically, most of today’s students won’t do as well as their parents—the arrows of the economy point down, despite the individualist mantra of schooling: “anyone can make it.” In this context, schools forge, consistently, specious views of common interest, ideas that say, “we are all in this together” (school spirit, nationalism, corporate/boss loyalty, etc.) when one thing is glaringly true: we are NOT all in this together. Some work. Others profit. Some order. Others obey—or not. Some strategize. Others die. Capital needs workers and warriors who are flexible and technologically adept, but whose hopes are tamped down, who are philosophically unobservant: clever, not wise.*

*6. It follows that teachers, who are not mainly educators in the sense of making use value, but who are school workers who are both exploited and exploiters, create enormous surplus value—the coming generations of employees and fighters, but as with any worker, to be productive is not a glory, but a misfortune (Marx).<sup>13</sup>*

*In other words, the more school workers engage in the alienating daily life of schooling, neither controlling the processes (curriculum, textbooks, high-stakes exams) nor products of their work, the less human those teachers become and, from the other angle, the more they enrich those who exploit them—as the path from high stakes standardized exams to merit pay and the loss of tenure*

*easily shows. In addition, the production of results on high-stakes exams split school workers from their best potential allies: students and parents. Students don't have to be taught that test-drilling is drudgery. In fact, in a few districts, some heroic students upended the exams with the slogan "Be a Hero—Take A Zero" and they did it, demonstrating perfect test-taking knowledge; screwing their bosses. Parents, however, have been easily manipulated by administrators and executives, whipsawed against teachers. In Boston, parents are now demanding to be part of the collective bargaining process to guarantee that test scores will be tied to merit pay.<sup>14</sup>*

*High-stakes exams are but a deep version of the conspicuous kinds of surveillance that plague schools today: security guards, cameras, unrelenting adult supervision. What little of recess remains is overseen by adults who cannot seem to understand that children will organize their own play, creatively.*

*Surely, some courageous real educators have resisted, fought back in often creative ways, from direct confrontation to circumventing the many powers of hierarchy, keeping their ideals and still teaching. Those educators in the U.S., however, have been far too few. Indeed, I think I can name most of them—out of a 3.5 million person force.*

*7. Behind the commodity fetish of school, as with any commodity from oil to computers to shovels and laborers, is coercion. Teachers must join the preposterous war of all on all, simply to win jobs, while student truants face arrest, parental penalties, death-by-drop-out, etc. Fear and violence of all forms are counter-critical elements of school's icon.*

*8. Competition plays a key role, sorting people behind feigned test-fetish science, which is not science, but occultism. That would be shown true in, for example, the relationship of real estate values and student test scores. Market-based competition leads to fraud and corruption. Test cheating is rampant, as is administrative and staff theft from schools. The market-in-schools, then, recreates the society's pyramid structure of inequality.<sup>15</sup>*

*9. Schooling as a fetishist icon de-skills and diminishes, in the main, nearly all concerned, rationalizing and dividing the processes of learning, splitting mental and manual labor, more and more following a factory model where the boss seeks to replace the mind of the worker with the boss' mind—and values too. Labor in schools becomes an alien will and intelligence.<sup>16</sup>*

*10. Fetishist schooling utilizes technology, not to humanize and make life better, but to defeat labor and focus critical thought on form over substance. The drive for computers and flashy smart boards, for example, ignores the reality that those who have a "why" to learn can work with nearly any "how," no matter what their physical circumstances, especially if the "Why" actually makes sense, can be tested in life.*

*11. Today, voodoo schooling is as segregated by race and class as at the time of Brown vs. the Board of Education, in the mid-50's, forming five or six levels of capitalist schooling, funded by*

*an unjust tax system, teaching different “facts,” using different methods, while the ruling classes send their children to private, super-capitalist, schools which, if one accepts their outlooks and goals, can be seen as authentic education centers for the rich. These are not, truly, public schools.*<sup>17</sup>

*12. In capitalist schools and colleges of education, teaching methods still dominate substantive knowledge, an un-dialectical separation, while under the false flag of social justice, the thousand forms of selfishness that keep capitalism afloat are reinforced every day and opportunism, placing the common good second, abounds—glaringly true in, for example, colleges of education where ignorance, cowardice, racism, and opportunism rule the day. Consider the absence of all professors, but notably college of education profs, in the recent massive protests against imperialist wars and educational cuts on March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2010, throughout the US.*<sup>18</sup>

*13. Iconicized schooling pretends to prepare people for the “real world,” when, in essence, the most vital issues of human life, labor, rational knowledge, love and sexual pleasure, and the relentless struggle to be free of exploitation and tyranny, are mostly banned; illegal and/or never practiced.*

*Taken apiece: meaty study of labor is illegal in most states as to do it is to study Marx and Marxist social movements. Rational knowledge is banned. How many classroom teachers, or professors for that matter, are willing to say, “people make gods; gods don’t make people?” Sexuality must be taught in connection with fear, STD’s, pregnancy horrors. Not: it feels good. Freedom or the critique of tyranny is not there because freedom cannot be practiced and radical criticism is usually an absentee.*<sup>19</sup>

*What results is a daily reproduction of quasi-science (we can get to the moon but cannot erase capital’s need for racism as an ideology and profitable practice) and incoherence. The fetish of schooling produces, successfully, students so bored by the tedium of not learning under the guise of learning, that they learn not to like the struggle for knowledge. Students learn to kill their own curiosity and to lie about their own true proficiencies. As bad, they learn to split the word and the deed when students pretend to study and teachers pretend to teach—a daily taxi dance that dulls all on the floor. Students learn indifference, worse than hate, the opposite of love.*

*14. Schools reify, make normal, the divisions of science and art, history and math, disconnect experience and the intellect.*

*15. There are, in a secret underworld that nobody but the ruling class and its denizens notice, dangerous, lumpen, school systems, virtual holding pens like much of Detroit, where the children of the permanently stagnant section of the reserve army of the unemployed are located and controlled—or not controlled. These are veritable hothouses for barbarism where teaching and administration is seen, too often, as a job bank for the gatekeepers of this hell, and students are prepared for a life impossible to enter the work force over the long term: cannon fodder, Walmart employees, or prisoners feeding the endless growth of the jail industry.*

16. Schools are huge markets (consider the property values, architects, buildings, book suppliers, lawyers, labor costs, busses, etc.). All inside are necessarily commodified. That is how the system works. In California, for example, each student is worth about \$26 a day, based on Average Daily Attendance. Hence, absence is as much a cost factor as a loss of knowledge, indeed more-so. Inversely, Michigan's Education Department fought to extend the school year on the premise that being schooled for more days would make kids smarter, or more to the point, successful on the state test, the MEAP, which at the time was administered by the state's Treasury Department and scored by Standard and Poors. The best laid plan was stymied, however, when the collapsing tourism industry intervened, forcing the start of school back after the long, lucrative, Labor Day holiday.<sup>20</sup>

17. Commodified schooling shrouds an immense tax funded babysitting arena serving employers of, often, single parents, employers who dodge the cost of raising the next, oncoming, multiplication of workers.

18. Inside the market system, schools mirror the contradictory affective/emotional make up of the market. Trust (property law pretending to be the Rule of Law) and Faith (endless growth, accumulation, and expansion) meet greed and fear (panic after panic after panic). Given the test score hoodoo, fear is the prime emotional background of schooling today.

19. Schools obliterate the reality of capitalism and its relationship to real people. Schools promote the idea that democracy dominates capitalism (bourgeoisie political science enacted in sandbox student councils), when it does not. Iconicized schooling wipes out not only the fact of class warfare, and hatred of tyranny, and, worse still, the history of successful resistance and revolution that connects directly to the daily life of students and real educators.

Despite the fetishist denials of most self-proclaimed Mother Superiors and Cardinals of mainstream education, there is a direct line from the avowedly capitalist economy to schooling is made clear by recent statements from the White House:

Rahm Emanuel: "Schools are a conveyor belt for the economy."

Obama: "Schools are the core of our economic growth."

Or, the appointed (anointed) Paul Vallas, former saboteur of the Chicago school system and now the overseer of the ruins in New Orleans: "I would happily have a teaching force made up of 50% recent grads from prestigious colleges who only commit for a couple of years and 50% of experienced teachers."

20. Iconicized, fetishist, capitalist schooling befogs, denies, ignores, deflects, the emergence of national socialism in the USA, the corporate state—and the relation of that crisis to, for example,

*demands for a national curriculum, the militarization of schooling, the set up of national service as a syphon for to head off middle class resistance to a draft. That pairs with the true financial and imperial crises in the U.S. and the parallel attacks on teachers' wages, benefits, and tenure—assaulting the last people in the working class who have these benefits. Teachers who bought the icon, however, have for too long accepted the bribe to abuse children behind the NCLB and RaTT, now find themselves without allies in the working class and, again, bamboozled by the latest demagogue, Obama, and his union boss supporters who, themselves, live very well on the empire's bribes.*<sup>21</sup>

*Working people in the past fought for their children's education. When they got schooling, they resisted as back in the day when unions fought vocational education programs in order to control their own trades. Now, as capital solidified its domination of democracy and schooling, we need to take another look at the resistance.*<sup>22</sup>

### **Resistance and the Unionite Fetish With A Dash of Education Resistance Too**

*“Nothing can emerge at the end of the process which did not appear as a presupposition and precondition at the beginning. But, on the other hand, everything also has to come out. Thus, if at the end of the process of production, which was begun with the presuppositions of capital, capital appears to have vanished as a formal relation, then this can have taken place only because the invisible threads which draw it through the process have been overlooked.”*<sup>23</sup>

*21. Schools overcome fetishization when they are met by resistance from within and without. Last March 4<sup>th</sup>, led by notably integrated masses of students, colleges and universities and many k12 schools were shut down by civil strife: walkouts, strikes, demonstrations, teach-ins, and occupations. These actions moving out centrifugally from school-icons into communities, became vast educational centers where people gained and tested knowledge in an atmosphere made free, yet facing down the force, the iron fist, inside the velvet glove of iconicized schooling.*

*22. Resistance, however, is sabotaged by the traditional organizations for redress: the school unions, the American Federation of Teachers and the, much larger, National Education Association.*

*Both unions not only accept the division of labor that schooling fetishizes, but their leaders deny the very reason most people join unions: the contradictory interests of employers and workers.*

*Instead, the union tops promote what former NEA president Bob Chase called “New Unionism,” that is, the unity of government bosses, corporate leaders, and union Quislings, “in the national interest.” Denying the reality of class struggle, the union leaders routinely recreate the hierarchies of the education industry in mirror-like fashion, then betray the real interests of their own members, in order to preserve the national good, that is, class rule. In this sense, unions themselves are a form of fetish. Most people believe they, unions, are unions. They are, instead,*

*systems of disunity (dividing people by job, race, industry, etc). Unionism, then, is not unionism, but a fantasy of what might or should be, a la school and education.*

*23. The two unions, both claiming the mantle of anti-racism, include membership of teachers from a force that is about 90% white: structural racism from the outset. Rather than fight to integrate the teaching force, the unions urge more and more “education” classes, adding on expenses for students, meaning those with the least get shaved out with razor sharp precision—by class and race.<sup>24</sup>*

*24. The urban AFT allowed big-city education to rot while negotiating one retreat after another, organizing decay, behind the banner that concessions would save jobs when, in fact, concessions are like giving blood to sharks—bosses only want more. Most recently, the Detroit Federation of Teachers, behind AFT president Randi Weingarten, bargained the worst contract in school history, giving up tenure, merit pay, cuts in health benefits, and \$500 per paycheck.<sup>25</sup>*

*Meanwhile, the mostly suburban NEA allowed the AFT to conduct its methodical disintegration but, as the old labor saw, “An injury to one only precedes an injury to all,” proved true; NEA members came under the same regimented curricula/high-stakes exams/merit pay, tenure-attack, cyclone that hit AFT years before.*

*25. Since the mid-1970's, union bosses supported every measure that elites used to regain control of schools, which were, in many cases, out of control. The NEA and AFT bosses today support curricular regimentation, high stakes racist exams, the militarization of schooling, merit pay, and charter schools (a key new source of dues income). In 2009, NEA celebrated the Obama election and the appointment of education-thug Arne Duncan; then in 2010 NEA leaders defended Obama's war agenda (and planned to spend millions on the next election—combined NEA and AFT are top funders of the political class). In 2010, AFT invited billionaire, school privatizer, and convicted monopolist, Bill Gates, to keynote their convention.<sup>26</sup>*

*26. The education unions serve to peddle the wage labor of education workers as a commodity to employers and to guarantee labor peace. In this context, there is a direct trade off: no strikes or job actions in exchange for guaranteed dues income, the check-off. That is precisely the historical origin of the agency shop—lost knowledge today. It is also a big reason why union bosses obey court injunctions against job actions; threats to the union's bank account, that is, union staff salaries.<sup>27</sup>*

*Unionism's devotion to the bottom line should be abundantly clear. Go to a school union meeting and insist that students, who not only are school workers' best allies but are also positioned to play key leadership roles, have a vote. Then listen to the opposition's bottom line: “They don't pay dues!”*

*As in schools, market forces encourage not only union hierarchy (jobs for life) but also corruption, especially true in the American Federation of Teachers where a steady stream of leaders, from Washington D.C. to Florida have been jailed for, not only looting the treasury, but child-rape.*

*27. School unions attack the working class as a whole. The most recent example (May 2009) of this was the support the California Teachers Association and the NEA gave to a series of ballot propositions that would have dramatically raised the taxes of poor and working people while leaving corporations and the rich off the hook, again. NEA and CTA combined spent more than \$12.2 million dollars on the campaigns, and lost overwhelmingly. CTA-NEA demonstrated to poor and working families that organized teachers are enemies—yet those same people are educators’ most important allies.*

*28. These are the empire’s unions. Top leaders are fully aware that a significant portion of their sky-high pay is made possible by the empire’s adventures. NEA and AFT bosses work with a variety of international organizations on behalf of U.S. imperialism. These adventures are frequently deadly as with the AFT’s unwavering support for both U.S. nationalism and Israeli Zionism, support for the recent oil wars, and, precisely to the point, work throughout the world with the National Endowment for Democracy, a Central Intelligence Agency front, in wrecking indigenous leftist worker movements. While the AFT has been the spearhead of U.S. imperialism inside the wholly corrupt “labor movement,” NEA has also been deeply involved. There is a long history to this, back to World War I and the AFL’s support for that horrific war. The theory behind it: US workers will do better if foreign workers do worse.*

*There is, however, deeper, more profound resistance. Its long term goal is a mass, class conscious movement designed to transcend the system of capital, to retain what may have been good aspects of it (science for example), abolish what was not (wars, racism, sexism, exploitation, etc), and to create a new world where people can be reasonably free, critical, creative, by sharing, each from his or her commitment to each according to need. The last thing school and union bosses want to see is that mass class conscious movement as it would, at the least, make them irrelevant.*

*This movement recognizes the need to be inside capital’s schools, doing all people can to teach well, keeping their ideals, and learning well as too—in the real tradition of radical, to the root, education, distinct from schooling. This activity goes on in schools throughout the U.S. and needs to be recognized, especially for the courage and sheer perseverance of the true educators and students who do it. This is the starting point of abolishing old-style schooling, retaining what is good about it (like literacy, history, math, art, music, play, etc.) and creating something entirely new in a more equitable and democratic world.*

*That, of course, is revolutionary. Abolishing or hiding the necessity of revolution leaves any movement directionless, without a north star, only recreating capitalism in somewhat new ways.*

*The point is to not merely grasp the role of commodity fetishism in schools, but to upend the relationship of school and education.*

*Closed schools when matched by freedom schooling is education as a use value—humanizing, unleashing the creativity of people too long unplugged from the connection of learning and life—the revolutionary spirit may be on the land again!*

*Will my little stories and allegory to the fetishized world of schooling, vs. education, help those in school and out? I hope.*

*Up the rebels!*

*Good luck to us, every one.*

*r*

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<sup>1</sup>. Karl Marx, Capital, a Critique of Political Economy, Volume 1, Lawrence Wishart edition, p477.

<sup>2</sup>. Rhee quoted in the Washington Post, 8/19/10 linked here:

<http://voices.washingtonpost.com/dcschools/>

<sup>3</sup>. The proper quote from Jean Anyon is, “Doing school reform without doing social and economic reform is like washing the air on one side of a screen door; it won’t work.”

<sup>4</sup>. Rich Gibson, Substance News, May 2010, Against Ravitch. Online at <http://www.substancenews.net/articles.php?page=1255&section=Article>

<sup>5</sup>. Rich Gibson, July 2010, The NEA Representative Assembly: Proof the Education Agenda is a War Agenda, Substance News, online at

<http://www.substancenews.net/articles.php?page=1526&section=Article> and an expanded view

<http://www.substancenews.net/articles.php?page=1539&section=Article>

<sup>6</sup>. James Surowiecki, The New Yorker, August 7, 2010 online at

[http://www.newyorker.com/talk/financial/2010/07/05/100705ta\\_talk\\_surowiecki](http://www.newyorker.com/talk/financial/2010/07/05/100705ta_talk_surowiecki) On Freire, see Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Thoreau is from Walden, chapter 3, online at:

[http://www.eoearth.org/article/Walden: Chapter 03 \(historical\)](http://www.eoearth.org/article/Walden: Chapter 03 (historical))

<sup>7</sup>. The Artillery Journal (April 2010) Going Tribal, Enlisting Afghan Tribes p57.

<sup>8</sup>. Rich Gibson, Counterpunch (September 2010) online at:

<http://www.counterpunch.org/gibson09072010.html>

<sup>9</sup>. 56 million kids: <http://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/index.html>

<sup>10</sup>. Chalmers Johnson (2008) Nemesis. Metropolitan Books, NYC, p278.

<sup>11</sup>. See for example, Russian Teachers and Peasant Revolution, The Politics of Education in 1905, by Scott J. Seregeny, Indiana University Press, 1989.

<sup>12</sup>. David Harvey, A Companion To Marx’s Capital, Verso, 2009. P12.

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<sup>13</sup>. Karl Marx, Capital, Volume 1. International Publishers, NYC. P644.

<sup>14</sup>. Education Action Group (September 9, 2010) “Boston Parents Demand Role in Contract Negotiations” online at: <http://eagfdn.org/inthenews.html>

<sup>15</sup>. On test cheating, see for example “The Cheat Sheet, Under Pressure, Teachers Tamper With Tests, NY Times, 6-10-10: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/11/education/11cheat.html>  
Detroit has long been a focal point of school administrator corruption. Here is one of but a stream of similar pieces: “Former DPS Official Gets 24 Months for Payroll Fraud,” Detroit News, 9-10-10: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/11/education/11cheat.html>

<sup>16</sup>. It would be correct to say that Taylorist methods infected education for decades, back to the early 1900's (see Callahan, Education and the Cult of Efficiency or F.W. Taylor, Principles of Scientific Management) but to place the current frenzy in historical context means tracking the ruling classes' measures to recapture schooling since the uprisings of the Vietnam era, through Nation At Risk, on to NCLB, and now to the RaTT, each trumping the last.

<sup>17</sup>. Rich Gibson, Rouge Forum Broadside: Why Have School? Education and the Resistance (September 2010) online at <http://richgibson.com/WhyHaveSchoolSept%202010.pdf>

<sup>18</sup>. Rich Gibson, Substance News (3-7-10), The March 4<sup>th</sup> Actions, online at: <http://www.substancenews.net/articles.php?page=1234&section=Article>

<sup>19</sup>

. Some teacher do get away with critiquing tyranny, proof that people will resist. Here is one lesson that I hope is helpful as a starting point: <http://www.richgibson.com/masterslave.htm>

<sup>20</sup>. I am aware of the invasion of schooling conducted by privateers like Bill Gates and Eli Broad. However, privatizing is a second-tier issue. It's difficult to determine the total Gates “contribution” to education year to year as the Foundation's grants are scattered to a long list of recipients. However, the total endowment is about \$33 billion. Then consider just the current education budget, at about \$160 billion (Billion), from the federal government alone. To focus solely on privatization is to, on one hand, give false support to what is capitalist education, not public education, to abandon a critique of the capitalist state and harken back to mythical good old days of public education which never existed and, on the other hand, to follow the path of those who complain bitterly about the mercenaries the US employees around the world, but are willing to ignore the fact that the capitalist state, the corporate state, pays for those mercenaries and to point back to the much more kindly and polite US military's days which never existed either. While I see the working of a corporate state, others who I respect do see privatization as key. Note Susan Ohanian citing Gates' influence on the Common Core Standards as well as Ken Saltman, here: [http://www.susanohanian.org/show\\_commentaries.php?id=830](http://www.susanohanian.org/show_commentaries.php?id=830)

<sup>21</sup>. On the linkage of financial and imperial crises, see Chalmers Johnson, Dismantling the Empire, Metropolitan Books, 2010. On the notable pay of education union tops (\$686,949 in one year to past National Education President, Reg Weaver) see the US Labor Department site and check the LM2 reports for your own union leadership.

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<sup>22</sup>. It is tempting to say that workers always wanted public education. There is a contradictory record well outlined in Bowles and Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America*, (1976) Basic Books, NYC. Sad to say, it is very hard to find. See especially Part III.

<sup>23</sup>. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 1973, Paladin, Suffolk, p93.

<sup>24</sup>. US Department of Education Chart on Racial Make-up of Public School Teachers:  
[http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/tables/state\\_2004\\_18.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/tables/state_2004_18.asp)

<sup>25</sup>. Rich Gibson. The Detroit Federation of Teachers Contract—the Worst Ever? Substance News, January 2010 online at <http://www.substancenews.net/articles.php?page=1063&section=Article>

<sup>26</sup>. On the NEA Representative Assembly, 2009, 2010, see Substance News author's summary, Rich Gibson, here: <http://www.substancenews.net/authors.php?author=Rich+Gibson+>

<sup>27</sup>. The NEA's total budget will be \$357,739,880 in 2010. Combined, NEA and AFT are the top contributors to national political campaigns.

<http://www.substancenews.net/articles.php?page=1539&section=Article>