

The Destructive Path of Neoliberalism

An International Examination of Urban Education

Bradley Porfilio and Curry Malott (Eds.)



Sense

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The Destructive Path of Neoliberalism: An International Examination of Urban Education, a compilation of twelve essays by leading scholars and educators, sheds light on the social, political, economic, and historical forces behind the rise of neoliberalism, the dominant ideological doctrine impacting developments in schools and other social contexts across the globe for over thirty years. Several authors provide rich empirical data from schools across the globe to capture how neoliberal imperatives, discourses, and practices are impacting teachers, students, and communities at today's historical juncture. Finally, several contributors have developed pedagogical initiatives, suggest policy considerations, and convey theoretical insights designed to assist us in the struggle against the corporatization of schooling and social life.

An International Examination of Urban Education: The Destructive Path of Neo-liberalism, by Bradley Porfilio and Curry Malott, is an important and provocative text, indeed, not only for its careful and eloquent theoretical and analytical examination of neo-liberalism and "globalization" in urban educational contexts — and the dystopic and globally catastrophic consequences of these instantiations of late-capitalism — but also because it is what its name implies, an *international* study of these phenomena (a study and critique by those most immediately and directly effected by the "manifest destiny" of capitalist imperialism). As neo-liberalism appears to be both in continued ascendancy and immanent collapse, Porfilio and Malott's text is a *must read* for every serious student of education, political science and sociology.

Marc Pruyn, New Mexico State University (co-editor, most recently, with Luis Huerta-Charles of *De la Pedagogía Crítica a la Pedagogía Revolucionaria: Ensayos para Comprender a Peter McLaren* from Siglo XXI Press in Mexico).

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Scope

Cultural studies provides an analytical toolbox for both making sense of educational practice and extending the insights of educational professionals into their labors. In this context *Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education* provides a collection of books in the domain that specify this assertion. Crafted for an audience of teachers, teacher educators, scholars and students of cultural studies and others interested in cultural studies and pedagogy, the series documents both the possibilities of and the controversies surrounding the intersection of cultural studies and education. The editors and the authors of this series do not assume that the interaction of cultural studies and education devalues other types of knowledge and analytical forms. Rather the intersection of these knowledge disciplines offers a rejuvenating, optimistic, and positive perspective on education and educational institutions. Some might describe its contribution as democratic, emancipatory, and transformative. The editors and authors maintain that cultural studies helps free educators from sterile, monolithic analyses that have for too long undermined efforts to think of educational practices by providing other words, new languages, and fresh metaphors. Operating in an interdisciplinary cosmos, *Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education* is dedicated to exploring the ways cultural studies enhances the study and practice of education. With this in mind the series focuses in a non-exclusive way on popular culture as well as other dimensions of cultural studies including social theory, social justice and positionality, cultural dimensions of technological innovation, new media and media literacy, new forms of oppression emerging in an electronic hyperreality, and postcolonial global concerns. With these concerns in mind cultural studies scholars often argue that the realm of popular culture is the most powerful educational force in contemporary culture. Indeed, in the twenty-first century this pedagogical dynamic is sweeping through the entire world. Educators, they believe, must understand these emerging realities in order to gain an important voice in the pedagogical conversation.

Without an understanding of cultural pedagogy's (education that takes place outside of formal schooling) role in the shaping of individual identity—youth identity in particular—the role educators play in the lives of their students will continue to fade. Why do so many of our students feel that life is incomprehensible and devoid of meaning? What does it mean, teachers wonder, when young people are unable to describe their moods, their affective affiliation to the society around them. Meanings provided young people by mainstream institutions often do little to help them deal with their affective complexity, their difficulty negotiating the rift between meaning and affect. School knowledge and educational expectations seem as anachronistic as a ditto machine, not that learning ways of rational thought and making sense of the world are unimportant.

But school knowledge and educational expectations often have little to offer students about making sense of the way they feel, the way their affective lives are shaped. In no way do we argue that analysis of the production of youth in an electronic mediated world demands some "touchy-feely" educational superficiality. What is needed in this context is a rigorous analysis of the interrelationship between pedagogy, popular culture, meaning making, and youth subjectivity. In an era marked by youth depression, violence, and suicide such insights become extremely important, even life saving. Pessimism about the future is the common sense of many contemporary youth with its concomitant feeling that no one can make a difference.

If affective production can be shaped to reflect these perspectives, then it can be reshaped to lay the groundwork for optimism, passionate commitment, and transformative educational and political activity. In these ways cultural studies adds a dimension to the work of education unfilled by any other sub-discipline. This is what *Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education* seeks to produce—literature on these issues that makes a difference. It seeks to publish studies that help those who work with young people, those individuals involved in the disciplines that study children and youth, and young people themselves improve their lives in these bizarre times.

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Bradley Porfilio & Curry Malott (eds.)
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NEOLIBERALISM, EDUCATION AND COST-EFFECTIVE STATE TERROR IN AUSTRALIA

Life is beautiful. Let the future generations cleanse it of all evil, oppression and violence and enjoy it to the full. (Leon Trotsky, 1940)

Amid the hearty laughter and the clinking of champagne glasses that have lifted the stock market into the stratosphere, it is easy for Prime Minister John Howard and his button down conservative allies to proclaim the roaring success of the Australian economy, ranked by the IMF as one of the most resilient in the world (IMF Executive Board, 2006). It seems that not a day goes by without some corporate profit record being broken or that you hear about record spending on defence that the unrepentant war criminals have reaped in the name of protecting "our way of life" and "Homeland Security." Here, neo-liberalism is seen as the talisman for reducing poverty (through a trickle down effect) and promoting individual choice, social responsibility and economic development (place prosperity) through a package of mutually reinforcing "free market" policies. But there is something darker than happily ever after as Howard's fairy tale turns into a realistic real-life horror story set in working class Australia. There are no fairytale endings for the mostly poor, working class—living the Australian Dream on unprecedented levels of debt—only unpleasant surprises—as Howard's Cinderella tale collides with reality to reveal that this Prince is actually a toad.

Like Cinderella's fairy godmother, Howard is widely reported to have performed magical good deeds in the economic sphere bringing prosperity to all. Closer inspection reveals that Cinderella's pumpkin has not really turned into a gilded coach for the upwardly mobile "aspirational" working class. While Howard claims to have increased business productivity and in turn created more wealth to spread around, beneath this rhetoric lies the reality of a pitiless economic system that puts profits ahead of the satisfaction of human and non-human needs (Horin, 2007). Despite a crescendo of promise and hype, neo-liberalism is reinscribing the boundaries between the haves and have-nots, particularly as the mortgage belt tightens with rising interest rates and unprecedented debt. Howard's industrial relations legislation, the preposterously named WorkChoices, is calculated to accelerate a massive transfer of wealth and income from workers to a tiny isolated layer of the population, whose fortunes aren't tethered to the rest of Australia. In this industrial boot camp, the naked brutality and exploitation at the

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heart of private property is evident in the plain fact that the working class is working harder, longer and for less money. To add insult to injury, as the champagne corks pop and the crustless cucumber sandwiches are passed around at Liberal Party fund raising functions that serve as the boardroom of the ruling class, you will not hear about any bold new policy proposals to reduce the suffering caused by neo-liberalism, e.g., to combat poverty; to protect workers rights; to promote gender equality or for that matter to reduce gaps in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and education.

As the economy starts to sputter and falter and the working poor is forced to rely on handouts from St Vincent de Paul, Mission Australia and the Salvation Army, unionised and working-class Australians will begin to bear the brunt of an intensified "class war from above" in everyday life, e.g., continued attacks on organised labour and the annual downsizing of the state sector through cuts in expenditure as a proportion of gross domestic product (GDP) (Hill, 2006). During this current period of dislocation and transition, the working class is confronted with the structural violence associated with the full-fledge expansion of exchange relations into every sphere of social life. Drawing upon Lenin's (1965a) theory of imperialism, this is the case as decaying capitalism seeks to "...dispense with massive forms of social use-value expenditure" (e.g., public housing, health and education) and to convert the use-value of untapped resources and labor into surplus value and eventually exchange value (Frankel, 1978, p. 48). Despite the propaganda of the ideologues and propagandists of the imperialist bourgeoisie, it is absolutely obvious that the augmentation of value is only possible through the increased discipline of labor time and the corresponding exploitation of labor power under capitalism. Within the social universe of capital, it is labor that gives value to what is produced and it is for this reason that capital is less an object than a social relation (McLaren, 2005; McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2005; Rikowski, 2000, 2001).

Making a mockery of direct democracy, the ruling class is attempting "to prevent the state sector from operating the production process" in order to improve conditions for the appropriation and accumulation of surplus value (Frankel, 1978, p. 38). Its highly aggressive attitude toward the "cradle to grave" welfare state is premised upon a neo-liberal belief that "...state policies or socialization processes negate discipline, the work ethic, internalization of conventional perceptions of authority, laws, consumption" (p. 54). Scantly clad in the rhetoric of "choice" and "freedom" to sell its package of neo-liberal reforms to the public, this paper argues that the ruling class has engaged in a defensive strategy of re-politicizing the administrative ideological state apparatus through such "boundary blurring" strategies as privatization, deregulation and decentralization (Frankel, 1978, p. 40; Starr, 1990). Starr (1990) defines "boundary blurring" policies and proposals such as providing parents with "choice" through the provision of school vouchers "...as a second-best alternative to eliminating public spending for many services altogether."¹ In Australia, the six states and two territories are constitutionally required to provide free public education and inviting greater private sector involvement "...in the performance of functions that government cannot entirely

surrender" is designed to subject state enterprises such as schools to the discipline of market forces (Starr, 1990). As the plug is pulled on state-funded education, the toll is mounting, particularly for the most vulnerable students who are victims of geography, class and policy.

In this paper, I start by providing a very short introduction to globalization. I then argue for a Marxist theory of the state within the shifting contours of imperialism. Locating my narrative "at home" in the Australian context, I then discuss the ill effects of globalization on labour before providing a case study of "life in schools" (McLaren, 2007). Finally, after establishing that few Australian education researchers have focused on urban education over the past two decades, I argue that the struggle for free and universal education is tied up intimately with the class struggle for a society based on the meeting of collective rather than private profit needs.

GLOBALIZATION: A VERY SHORT INTRODUCTION

Locked into the "war on terror" and confronted with the competitive pressures of "globalization" or classical imperialism, the prevailing wisdom is that nation states such as Australia must accept capitalist institutions, methods and practices or face the inevitability of economic decline (Gamble, 1999, p. 5). Working hand-in-glove with imperialism, neo-liberalism enabled capitalism to overcome the economic stagnation and crisis of the 1970s and 1980s. Creating the ideological and material conditions for a new cyclical upswing in economic development, neo-liberalism has enabled the capitalist state to impose discipline over labor-time and to attract financial investment as the ruling class ambitiously strives to resolve the inherent contradictions and spatial limits of capital accumulation. Unlike classical liberalism, which held a wholly gloomy and negative view of the state for interfering with the rights and freedom of the autonomous individual, neo-liberalism has a "positive conception" of the regulatory state via privatization, deregulation, and decentralization (Hartman, 2006).

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, the ideological tide was running in the favor of market forces and it was clear to the ruling class that the size of the highly unionized and labor intensive state sector had grown disproportionately in relation to the monopoly and competitive sectors. The shift from Whitlam to the Hawke/Keating government in Australia was "representative of internal party reversals" in Britain (from Heath to Thatcher), the United States (from Nixon to Reagan) and Europe (from de Gaulle to Chirac) with the enactment of far reaching "new market-minded policies" hostile to the evils of the welfare state (Starr, 1990). Having borne witness to the collapse of the Soviet Union and degenerated workers' states in Eastern Europe, the ruling class was determined to re-establish the conditions of profitability progressively eroded during the post-war upswing (1950-73) through full employment, relatively high wage levels, and welfare programs. Keep in mind that many jobs in the non-competitive state sector were "...created in response to anti-"exchange relation" struggles" (Frankel, 1978, p. 35). These concessions were part of a new class compromise that was negotiated during the

dramatic Civil Rights and social movement era of the 1960s and 1970s amongst the different groups and strata "...excluded from, or marginally related to commodity production" (Frankel, 1978, p. 35). Far from forgetting the class struggle, this period of worldwide radicalization "marked a general questioning of bourgeois values" and these reforms in the form of expansion of the public sector and development of public services secured for the ruling class the necessary social stability required for the sake of profit over the long term (Smith, 2002).

Buoyed by the collapse of communism and the end of the Cold War (1989–1990), the ruling class announced loudly and clearly its return to form by striving for the expansion of capital. Sitting in the cockpit it mounted a massive offensive that put the working class "everywhere on the defensive" (Smith, 2002). In what has come to be known as "globalization," the forces of imperialism created the necessarily conditions for super-profits through the weakening of organised labor, reduced taxation and the opening of new markets to financial capital through the "tough love" austerity/debt relief policies of the WTO and IMF. Here, the economic gurus of the free market claim that "globalization" under the influence of the much ballyhooed "information revolution" spreads capitalist development, boosts the prosperity of the working class and blots out features of uneven development between and within different national economies (Foster, 2001, 2003). It is impossible to deny that over the past one hundred and fifty years, capitalist accumulation has led to the fastest growth of labor productivity in human history with its huge advances in productive techniques (Lotta, 1998, p. 9). At the same time, as capital spreads its seeds through the internationalized division of labor, it is also equally impossible to refute the fact that its growth is rooted in the unparalleled exploitation of the world's humanity and the savage plunder of the planet (Lotta, 1998, p. 9).

THE SHIFTING CONTOURS OF IMPERIALISM

What all this chaos underscores is the need for a more adequate Marxist theory of the state from the standpoint of Lenin's (1975a) theory of imperialism. In *State and Revolution*, Lenin (1965b) argues that "... the state is a special organization of force: it is an organization of violence for the suppression of some class." Under the definitive social relations of hierarchical and coercive capitalism that divide between the exploiter (the ruling class) and the exploited (the working class), the apparatuses of the state act advantageously in the interests of the bourgeoisie. Establishing the mode of production and class as indispensable analytical concepts to a Marxian theory of the state, Lenin argues that as a political/legal entity the state is not neutral but rather exists to hold social antagonisms in check in the favor of the ruling class. A good instance of what Lenin (1965b) is talking about is contained in the following, "There is not a single state, however democratic, which has no loopholes, or reservations in its constitution guaranteeing the bourgeoisie the possibility of dispatching troops against the workers, of proclaiming martial law, and so forth, in the case of a 'violation of public order,' and actually in case

evolved out of the horrors of the Great Depression. In light of all that economic "turbulence," Keynesian economics influenced President Roosevelt's New Deal administration in the United States and Britain's post-war Labour government. It was also institutionalized in the Bretton Woods system (1944–1971/73) of international monetary management, which gave birth to the IMF and World Bank (Brenner, 1999). However, the premise that speculation, in particular, the speculation of financial capital (e.g., in the form of hedge funds) is a functional "organizing" element of capitalism, inaugurated a transition to the current era of liberalized capital movements. Although much maligned, Lenin noted that one of the key features of imperialism was the emerging hegemony of financial capital.

Turning to the present, one of the self-serving fallacies of neo-liberalism is that export led production creates trickled-down prosperity (Bond, 2006). In reality, "Unequal exchange," is a process "...in which stronger capitalist countries appropriate surplus value from weaker parties in trade" (Halabi, 2002, p. 8). For example, as Halabi (2002) points out, much of what the US exports in the form of arms, movies and legal services "are sold above their value" while much of what the US imports, from foods to clothing to Plasma TVs and computers "are purchased below value" (p. 8). With regards to Lenin's theory of combined and uneven development, the relative privilege enjoyed by the working class in the home citadels of imperialism such as Australia, Britain and the United States is predicated upon the "...extraction of surplus value from colonized peoples through unequal exchange as well as through direct colonial exploitation in 'Free Trade Zones'" (San Juan, 2003). What matters here is that "...the superexploitation of colonial and "weak" nations has allowed the imperialists to preserve a relative class peace with their workers and that the economic and political foundations of this class peace remain generally unchanged in our time, notwithstanding the fact that the neo-liberal turn has taken away some of those privileges, which workers in the West received for being loyal to their imperialists" (Stolz, 2001).

In Australia, this period of class peace is associated with the rise of the "aspirational" working class. Noting that even Labor politicians are reluctant to use the clunky language of class, Scanlon (2004) writes, "The absence of the language of class is reflected in the rise of other ways of talking about collective social and economic identities. Terms such as "battler" and "aspirational", for example, are increasingly used in place of class to describe collective identities. Such terms cut across class lines. They express the kind of social fluidity that led the students in my criminology tute to conclude that there is no such thing as class and the cleaner in Nickel and Dimed to believe that a luxurious mansion was in her reach if she worked long and hard enough." On this point, Marxists argue the middle-class is an "ideological illusion" that is invented to obscure the fact that we are all wage earners (Ebert & Zavarzadeh, 2002). As Marx said in *Capital* Vol. 3, "middle and transitional" levels of social difference "always conceal the boundaries" of classes (cited in Ebert & Zavarzadeh, 2002). At a time when most people affirm their middle class identities through consumer "choice" in the sphere of culture and consumption, the various ranks of the middle class operate "...to give ideological stability to the economically insecure and unstable life under capitalism" (Ebert &

the exploited class 'violates' its position of slavery and tries to behave in a non-slavish manner" (p. 22).

Given the enormous and intrusive role of the modern security state, we must ask what type of democracy can exist in the general context of the struggle for workers' rights. In the form of a direct reply, Lenin (1975b) pointed out that liberal democracy is a convenient illusion because it works to ensure democracy for a tiny minority: the bourgeoisie. Unlike those starry-eyed liberals whose politics go no deeper than a *Nation* subscription, Lenin (1975b) stated: "It is natural for a liberal to speak of "democracy" in general; but a Marxist will never forget to ask: "for what class?" (p. 9). Thus, "We cannot speak of "pure democracy" as long as different classes exist: we can only speak of class democracy" (1975b, p. 19). "Hemmed in by the narrow limits set by capitalist exploitation," bourgeois democracy is in effect a dictatorship, "Democracy for an insignificant minority, democracy for the rich – that is the democracy of capitalist society" (Lenin, 1975a, pp. 103–104).

In 1916, amidst the horrors of the First World War, Lenin (1975a) defined imperialism as a historically specific stage in the development of capitalism. In short, his theory of imperialism offers us an explanation for the expansion of the authoritative state and uneven development behind the crumbling façade of "globalization." Long before the *Make Poverty History* campaign, Lenin (1975a) wrote, "The world has become divided into a handful of usurer states and a vast majority of debtor states" (p. 121). Contrary to the prevailing narrative that economic and technological changes have created a "global village," the world economy is not substantially more homogeneous, far from it. For the sake of brevity, Lenin (1975a) defined imperialism as "the highest stage of capitalism" and in a well known and oft quoted line, he wrote, "...capitalism's transition to the stage of monopoly capitalism, to finance capital, is connected with the intensification of the struggle for the partition of the world" (p. 92). The underlying thesis here is that this stage is the final and most degenerate and aggressive phase of decaying capitalism. Having metastasised into imperialism, Lenin (1965a) argued that this new and final phase of capitalism is characterised by five essential features:

- 1) the concentration of production and capital has developed to such a high stage that it has created monopolies which play a decisive role in economic life; 2) the merging of bank capital with industrial capital, and the creation, on the basis of this "finance capital," of a financial oligarchy; 3) the export of capital as distinguished from the export of commodities acquires an exceptional importance; 4) the formation of international monopolist capitalist combines which share the world among themselves, and 5) the territorial division of the world among the biggest capitalist powers. (p. 106)

The shift from Keynesian economics to neo-liberalism in the 1980s and 1990s expanded the franchise of imperialism. As a page in the encyclopedia of classical liberal or "free market" economics, Keynesianism challenged the anarchy or "laissez faire" model of economics. Based upon the ideas of a centrally planned or mixed economy developed by the British economist John Maynard Keynes, it

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Zavarzadeh, 2002). However as real wages decline and increasing numbers of people fall out of the ranks of the middle class into poverty, neo-liberalism has shattered the illusions of the poor and working class as the bolt slides across the door to social mobility.

Whilst analysing the features, movement and future direction of imperialist globalisation, the Marxist geographer David Harvey (2000) identifies key theorists who have developed explanations of how "...capitalism has structured its geography (such as Lenin's theory of imperialism, Luxemburg's positioning of imperialism as the saviour of capitalist accumulation, Mao's depiction of primary and secondary contradictions in class struggle)" (p. 55). Taking into account recent developments are also:

more synthetic accounts of accumulation on a world scale (Amin, 1974), the production of a capitalist world system (Wallerstein, 1974, Arrighi, 1994), the development of underdevelopment (Frank, 1969, and Rodney, 1981), unequal exchange (Emanuel, 1972) and dependency theory (Cardoso and Faletto)". (Harvey, 2000, p. 55)

By all accounts, imperialism is characterised by unequal relations between states, namely the core industrialized Western states and the peripheral economies of the neo-colonies in Africa, Asia and Latin America. On the one hand, imperialist countries such as the United States "...are strategically dependent on the Third World as a source of cheap labor, markets, and low-cost raw materials" in order to maintain a privileged way of life that exceeds the meeting of basic needs. On the other, as economic and ecological conditions dramatically worsen for the (so called) Third World, it is clear that the "free market" is built upon incredible violence and that "free trade" occurs between nations unequal in strength. Take for example the "free trade" pacts such as NAFTA that exploit comparative regional advantages as well as the structural adjustment programs (SAPs) imposed by the IMF/World Bank that reproduce the cycle of imperialism/colonialism.

With socialism kaput, globalisation theorists such as Giddens (1998) argue that competitive markets, private enterprise and the profit motive are here to stay. "No one," Giddens writes, "any longer has any alternatives to capitalism—the arguments that remain concern how far, and in what ways, capitalism should be governed and regulated" (1998, pp. 43–44). Echoing Francis Fukuyama's (1992) verdict that the most recent wave of geopolitical, economic and technological development has ushered in the "end of history," the Australian Federal Treasurer Peter Costello (2001) is on record as saying, "Globalisation describes what is happening. And ranting against globalisation is like ranting against the telephone." Despite the arrogant and bullying tone of the ruling class, if the ideologies of the free market have solved all the problems of modern society and what we are currently witnessing is the full richness of human culture, development and potential, then these are scary days indeed and the future looks even bleaker. Systematic overexploitation, enhanced by the globalization of production, has produced not only growing poles of extreme wealth and poverty both within and between nations

but also threatens to condemn human and non-human nature to oblivion as the planet is "poisoned and plundered" of its resources (Townsend & Burke, 2002). Yet, remarkably, the ideologists of imperialist globalization tell us that "...to oppose globalization is to oppose the future" and that the only option is to jump on the bandwagon "...or to be left behind" (Lotta, 1997, p. 4).

In sum, the globalization thesis is not simply "descriptive" of objective conditions but rather constitutes a new and hegemonic form of bourgeois ideology (Hanson, 2000). It is an ideological cover for good old-fashioned imperialism, that is, "the redivision of the world and colonial enslavement" in the interests of finance capital (Trotsky, 1939). What it announces is a world in which old and new forms of bourgeois property rights of exploitation and appropriation that "globalisation" is actually promoting are no longer threatened by socialism or other liberation struggles. As an ideology, therefore, globalization is a form of market triumphalism used to paper over the material reality of distinct national markets in which exploitation manifests itself. As a phenomenon, it is also clearly linked to neo-liberalism, especially in that its political and economic practices are systematically geared toward dismantling barriers to accumulation (Hill, 2001). More than anything else the objective is to produce conditions favorable to capital, which includes minimizing workers' rights in order to create an economy where labor is cheap and flexible and ensuring the unrestricted circulation of goods and services is guaranteed through "free trade" treaties, agreements and politics. Here, globalization is thin soup indeed.

THERE GOES THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

Like observing snow flakes melt as they fall from the sky and touch the ground, the effects of "globalization" on labor are clearly visible in Australia. Over the past two decades, the political representatives of the imperialist bourgeoisie including the "lesser evil" Australian Labor Party (ALP) actively fostered a vision that eroded the collective identity of "egalitarian" Australia. Capitalism requires ideologies of meritocracy and egalitarianism to hide the grim realities of class and exploitation. Even if this egalitarian identity and the principle of a "fair go" constitute a poisonous and destructive capitalist myth, neo-liberalism changed the balance of class forces operating in society, leaving its awful mark on the social consciousness of a besieged population. Laying the policy groundwork that would unravel over a hundred years of collective gains that limited labor exploitation, the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) negotiated the wages Accord in 1983. The Accord (1983, 1996), a centralized wage fixing system that took into account economic policies and the Consumer Price Index (CPI), mollified the ruling class during a period of severe economic crisis and political transition (Kuhn, 1986). As Australia slid deeply into recession and unemployment in the early 1980s and again in the early 1990s, the Accord protected the real purchasing power of workers' wages and also ensured that organized labor did not "rock the boat" once its architect, Bob Hawke and the rightwing ALP won office on 5 March 1983 (Lincoln, 2006). However, as Hawke surveyed his empire from the Lodge (the

official residence of the Prime Minister of Australia is in the national capital of Canberra), it also weakened the instincts as well as the fighting strength and capacity of organized labor.

The Workplace Relations Act passed in October 1996 by the newly elected Howard conservative government did not pull punches with the trade union movement. This piece of anti-working class IR legislation enabled the ruling class to move with renewed confidence and led to a stripping down of wages and conditions, particularly with the introduction of Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs). AWAs introduced individual agreements to allow workers the choice to negotiate directly with an employer over wages and conditions rather than to have a union negotiated agreement. With attention to detail, AWAs prohibit industrial action for the life of the agreement.

As Australia's trading partners fell into recession during the Asian Economic Crisis of 1997 and the U.S. experienced an economic slowdown after the 11 September terrorist attacks, Howard shrewdly used the rhetoric of choice and freedom embodied in neo-liberalism to forge a new social pact with an electoral basis in working class Australia. Mixed with a calculated vilification of the "Other," Howard has appealed to the "common" fears and aspirations of the "Aussie battler" (coded as white). He tackled an inherited budget deficit by cutting the overheads of the welfare state and boosted the living standards of the white middle class through the economic gains of parasitic imperialism, e.g., cheap consumer goods. Over the past decade, Australia witnessed the rise of the new right and the cult of the individual as Howard's mortgage-belt battlers put their own private economic interests ahead of collective rights, needs and obligations, e.g., Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land rights, the environment, public education and health care. In this atmosphere, the diffusion of neo-liberal policies combined with direct attacks on union power led to a decline in union membership. Despite pockets of resistance from the most militant trade unions such as the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) during the Patrick Stevedoring waterfront dispute and 400 striking members of Mining and Energy Division of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) at the Hunter Valley No. 1 mine, it is clear that the class compromise negotiated under the Accord actually laid the way open for policy changes that eroded the overall strength of organized labor (Lambert, 2000).

A key weapon in the arsenal of the ruling class in its far-reaching assault on workers' conditions and rights, the union movement and the left is the Howard government and its use of Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs) and the draconian WorkChoices legislation. To gain competitive advantage for its home-based industries, the Howard coalition government is using its IR "reform" agenda as a bludgeon to force the most vulnerable into a "race to the bottom." It's a race where the finish line is the bottom line, which acts in a deregulated environment to impose discipline over labor time by dividing workers over who will work faster, longer and for less. Following the initial round of industrial relations reforms in 1996 that were designed to undermine the collective bargaining power of unions, the Howard government passed the Work Choices legislation in March 2006.

Backed by a massive tax-payer funded propaganda campaign, WorkChoices reduced AWAs to five minimum standards, curtailed trade union access to worksites and gave the Workplace Relations Minister the authority to declare strikes illegal. Greg Combet, the ACTU Secretary recently stated, "Under these laws, unions and workers can be fined \$66,000 for even asking for workers to be protected from unfair dismissal or individual contracts, or for clauses that protect job security" (ACTU Media Release, 2005).

Under the pretence of helping students in the most challenging state schools, particularly those in urban areas with high numbers of working class and Aboriginal students, the Education Minister has attempted to link cash bonuses for individual teachers who turn out "high-achieving" students to AWAs (Topsfield, 2006). In a sign of things to come, Julie Bishop told *The Age*, "There are a range of options, from a bonus paid to salary packages, to teachers being employed under AWAs, which provide flexibility for performance-based incentives" (Topsfield, 2006). Looking to undercut the membership density and influence of the Australian Education Union (AEU), AWAs will enable the Federal government to have greater control over teachers, who are currently under state awards and agreements negotiated by unions. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has previously criticized certain provisions, including AWAs, of the Workplace Relations Act for breaching Conventions 87 and 98 that protect the right to collectively bargain and to strike (Isaac, 2006). It is little wonder that teachers joined thousands of other workers to attend union-organized rallies that protested the Howard government's WorkChoices legislation, which has only worsened the situation. Expressing concern on behalf of all Australians, the Prime Minister singled out teachers who participated in rallies in support of the *Your Rights at Work* campaign. "Let me say that I worry about this kind of behaviour undermining the quality of government education...around Australia (O'Halloran, 2006). At the same time, he has flagrantly ignored the Australian Education Union's call for 2.9 million in funding and played down its assessment that the overall decline in Federal funding spent on public education has impacted negatively on equity and fairness, with the increase in public funding to private schools fortifying their inherent privilege and position in the marketplace.

LIFE IN SCHOOLS: AN AUSTRALIAN CASE STUDY

Lifting its creeping line of artillery fire from the actual places to be assaulted, the Howard Conservative Coalition government directed its NCOs and omnipresent army of foot soldiers to engage in hand-to-hand combat in all sectors of the public education system. In a couple of gruelling encounters, this included calculated attacks on the curriculum and the rights of teachers and their unions (see also Hartcher, 2006). As part of a wider culture war that has intensified in response to the "ever-present" threat of Islamic terrorism, *The Australian* newspaper, owned by the media baron Rupert Murdoch, has provided ideological oxygen for this campaign with its claims that the public school curriculum has been

hijacked and dumb-downed to accommodate the chardonnay drinking ideologues of the multicultural Left. Warning that "the fangs of the left" are "visibly on display," Howard (2006) put the boot into public education at a speech to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the right-wing magazine *Quadrant*. With a sense that melodrama should have a higher moral purpose, he argued: "Few debates are as vital as those over education, whether it be in upholding basic standards on literacy and numeracy, promoting diversity and choice or challenging the incomprehensible sludge that can find its way into some curriculum material" (Howard, 2006). Hot on the heels of these comments the Federal Education Minister Julie Bishop joined the fracas with these fighting words: "Some of the themes emerging in school curriculum are straight from Chairman Mao - we are talking serious ideology here" (Topsfield & Rood, 2006). Amidst all the spin and fury, the Minister said that the bottom line is this: "Students should not be forced to interpret Shakespeare from a feminist or Marxist perspective" (Topsfield & Rood, 2006).

Always outspoken about his politics and beliefs, Hill (2003, 2006) points out that hidden behind the mask of equality that surrounds the seductive language of "standards" and "choice" is a narrow form of neo-liberal ideology that is being used to stigmatise and suppress oppositional activity and critical thought. Noting that the demands and standards of capital are ultimately antagonistic to the interests of labour, Hill (2004) states: "One the one hand, capital requires educated and flexible workers, but on the other hand it cannot countenance workers thinking fundamental critique for themselves-or coming across it in schools, vocational education or universities. So free thinking, and oppositional thinking has been chopped, curtailed, circumscribed." With a view to reasserting "traditional" Australian values and "moral discipline" amongst the next of generation of workers, the Howard government has allocated \$90 million over three years to fund the appointment of religious counsellors or chaplains to provide "spiritual and pastoral" guidance to primary and secondary school students in both the secular public and private school systems (Zimmer, 2007; God in the Machine, 2006). The objective, of course, is to regulate social norms and ethical frameworks in order to fashion a new vision of the ideal citizen.

By all indications, the federal government is using the discourse of standards, performance and accountability through which neo-liberal ideology is propagated to justify a national takeover of the public school system. In Australia, constitutional responsibility for the establishment and oversight of K-12 education resides with the six states and two territories, including the formation of policy, statutory reporting to State and Federal Ministers and financial management, with the federal government the main provider of funding (Miner, 2006). For this reason, the Australian government has a tremendous amount of influence over education as it controls the purse strings and allocates funds on the basis of state and territory governments meeting certain conditions in relation to primary and secondary education. Hence, the attempt of the Howard government to sneak in through the backdoor in order to influence behaviour and content through its emphasis on standards, choice and efficiency, which are all tied to funding arrangements designed to ensure "accountability."

The annual downsizing of spending in the public sector by the Howard razor gang to fund middle-class welfare and tax cuts has produced dire effects at all levels of the state-run education system (Dodson, 2003). According to a recent statement by the Federal President of the Australian Education Union, Pat Byrne (2007), "While Australia now ranks only 18th out of 30 in terms of education spending according to OECD reports, the Australian Government is the third highest spender on private education." In a recent interview with *Rethinking Schools* titled Australia Battles Privatization, Angelo Gavrielatos, Deputy President of the AEU, stated "Between 2005 and 2008, the federal government will give 75 percent of recurrent education funding to private schools... Thirty years ago, only 15 percent of students were in private schools. That figure has more than doubled, and nationwide approximately 32 percent of students are now in nongovernment schools. There is absolutely no doubt that the main result of this government funding has been to hasten the conservative dream of funnelling more and more students into private schools" (Miner, 2006). Adding to this, Gavrielatos put a floodlight on a glaring double standard when he noted the gap between the rhetoric of rewarding schools on the basis of performance and the reality that funding to private schools had not been accompanied by "...any true accountability or commitment to serve all students, especially indigenous students, those with special needs, or poorer students" (Miner, 2006). Indeed, just as private schools have failed to accommodate children with special needs and Aboriginal students in the urban areas, it is also a pretty safe bet that they will not rush to operate in rural and remote regions where operational costs are significantly higher (Miner, 2006).

SCHOOLING AND UNEVEN URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Pierides (2006) states that urban education has not been a targeted area of focus for Australian education researchers, particularly following the closure of the Centre for the Study of Urban Education at La Trobe University in Melbourne in the late 1980s (p. 3). Certainly, the changing topography of urban and suburban development in Australia cannot be easily compared to the institutionalized patterns of abandonment, disinvestment and social polarization that characterize the struggling urban core of cities in some countries such as the United States. First and foremost, Australia has always been a relatively highly urbanized country, although population movement from the rural and inland areas to the cities has increased recently partly because of planning policies (Australia State of the Environment, 2006). Providing a fascinating portrait of urban/suburban space, Brendan Gleeson (2006) has mapped and analyzed the changing geography of Australian cities under the tutelage of the state and its neo-liberal policies of "sustainable development." In uncompromising honesty, he paints a pretty bleak and discomfiting picture. Since the mid-1990s, uneven development in the working class and ethnic enclaves of Australian cities has been subject to the whitewashing effects of urban renewal policies in the form of gentrification spurred on by skyrocketing property prices. Intended or not, planning policies that encourage higher density housing in

I SUPPOSE THAT'S JUST THE WAY THE COOKIE CRUMBLES? A LEFT RESPONSE²

After the collapse of the former Soviet Union, Lenin's theory of capitalist decay was reduced by academics in the home citadels of imperialism to nothing more than an artefact in the "curiosity cabinet," relegated to history books, footnotes and bibliographies. It was symptomatic of this period of transition and decay that there was a slide to social regression, characteristic of the effects of imperialism. With regards to the current mood of the Australian electorate, household debt has risen substantially relative to income and the possibility of rising interest rates or unemployment has created fear, uncertainty and a certain lack of inertia as the working class begins to rally against the neo-liberal policies of the Howard government. Over the past two turbulent decades, decadent, parasitic and decaying imperialism has created an increase in jobs and conservatism amongst certain segments of the working class. But it is also undeniable that the effects of neo-liberalism are not evenly distributed and that the repeated attacks on living standards particularly the anti-union WorkChoices legislation has sparked widespread anger and militancy. Indeed, the results of the Australian National University's Australian Survey of Social Attitudes revealed a progressive shift in attitudes in 2003, as compared to 1987, on a range of issues including Aborigines, unions, and the funding of social services (Macdonald, 2005). Using data from the survey, Meagher (2004) states "Most Australians believe that governments are best suited to delivering child, aged, and health care than *any other form of organisation*, including families and relatives" (italics in the original). Countering the popular myth that neo-liberalism has tilted the working class hopelessly rightward, Australians expressed a high commitment to the provision of state-run education, with "over two-thirds" prepared to pay more tax to improve it (Wilson & Meager, 2004).

In Australia, the current neo-liberal offensive is not simply the product of imperialism's relentless drive towards expansion. Having repeatedly terrorised the labor power sector through blatant attacks on the Keynesian welfare state, the class antagonisms that have arisen are the effect of inherent contradictions at a specific stage in the development of capitalist accumulation. The focus on class antagonism between wage-labor and capital stemming from this distinctive phase of imperialism deserves attention, particularly as it relates to the development of proletarian class-consciousness and the future direction of class struggle. As Leon Trotsky (1909, 1911) made abundantly clear, socialists are completely opposed to all forms of terrorism. By the same token, this does not mean that workers should not criticize and resist the horrors of imperialism and cost-effectiveness state terror in favour of the construction of a more ecologically humane society orientated toward socialist ideals. Along with an independence of spirit and determination, socialism is about creating a society free of violence through "...the establishment of caring and loving [intergenerational] communities, which build bridges to connect different social sectors, people and organizations" (Martin, 2005). Given the importance of building democratic organization forms that can rise to the challenge, there are no shortcuts to building a progressive movement based in the material interests and needs

Australian cities led to problems of housing affordability and social exclusion as capital creates new sites of uneven development concentrated in the "poverty sinkholes" of the suburb heartland (Gleeson, 2006; Nixon, 2006). With regards to the unique geography and spatial ordering of "globalizing" cities in Australia, this points to the need for more empirical research into the dialectical relationship between the various neo-liberal policies that are working hand-in-hand to intensify the isolating and polarizing effects of uneven spatial development.

Highlighting the importance of place in education disparities, Pierides (2006) claims that the "epicentral positioning" of schools in the gentrified urban centres "normalises the experiences of teachers, including teacher educators, in urban settings" (Pierides, 2006, p. 1). In the battle torn streets of inner-city neighbourhoods and outer suburbs that remain stubbornly impervious to capitalist development, Pierides (2006) argues that in Australia, "...educational disadvantage has been most closely associated with socioeconomic status and gender (see for example Teese, 2000; Teese & Polesel, 2003) as well as rural youth and rural education" (see for example Wyn & Stokes, 2000; Wyn, Stokes, & Stafford, 1998). Despite a plethora of studies in disciplines such as geography and planning that have investigated the spatial and economic effects of urban restructuring in Australia, this topic does not seem to have piqued the interest of education researchers where studies in urban education have been few in number, and usually single-site case studies (Singh, 2005).

Since the golden age of the 1970s and 1980s, when the study of education and sociology was heavily influenced by Marxism and theories of class a handful of detailed case studies have looked at the complex dynamics of neo-liberal state restructuring in relation to schools and rural/working class communities. With the strong emphasis on consumer "choice" and the introduction of a user-pays policy, Connell (2003) argues that state schools are left with no choice but to become "entrepreneurial units" competing for potential customers (p. 237). Predictably, the education market is a battlefield and as it continues to mature schools are increasingly ranked through (unreliable) indicators of performance such as university placement rates and the construction of more data (standardized testing) in the form of quasi league tables that work to create a system of winners and losers (Connell, 2001). For the record, Connell's research offers a case study in the widening abyss separating the haves and have-nots in the public and private school system. All in all, the state's tactical retreat from building "community" through the public sector in favour of the collective capacity of market-mediated linkages has eroded vital social infrastructure such as schools. More fascinating from an ethnographic point of view, Connell (2003) argues that the "ethic of a fair go" is still strong in Australian working-class life, which has mitigated the drift toward "market-type behaviour" (p. 248). Finding a range of attitudes, he argues that working class families still rely heavily "on the bureaucratic machinery of state education to deliver a reasonable education for their children" (p. 249). On the ground, he notes that, "There is still a great deal of good will and respect for schooling, and some schools make very good use of it" (p. 249).

of the working class. More specifically, as workers resist the commodification and capitalization of all spheres of social life, it is incumbent upon the class struggle wing of the educational Left to tap into the various struggles of resistance by developing a more reflexive orientation toward community (Martin, 2005). In an age of home-grown terrorism, the only way that free universal education, health, childcare, human rights or a real and lasting "peace" will ever be achieved is by the linking of all struggles of the most oppressed and exploited to the goal of socialism.

NOTES

¹ A voucher system of funding does not exist in Australia, however, a trial voucher scheme was introduced for children falling behind in literacy and the Education Minister Julie Bishop has recently expressed strong support for the notion of vouchers to give parents "choice" (Conference Statement, 2005; Morton, 2006).

² Subtitle inspired by the lyrics from Lily Allen's song *Everything's Just Wonderful*.

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THE SILENCING OF THE AFRICAN MIND

Neoliberalism and Education in Senegal and Burkina Faso

The francophone countries in West Africa share nearly the same educational system left by France after the "consensual" independence of the 1960s. It is controlled by the ministry of education, which alone determines the reforms, the curricula, teachers' appointments, and salaries. Typically, formal education was modeled on the metropolitan system to suit the needs and interests of the colonial administration rather than that of the people of the region (Ki-Zerbo, 1990; Chafer, 1994; Basse, 1999). According to Fafunwa (1974), the establishment of schools was usually motivated by utilitarian considerations, not by humanitarian motives. They had two primary purposes: the provision of middle and lower-level human power for the colonial bureaucracy and the private European companies and the conversion of the indigenous population to Christianity. In British and Belgian colonies, especially, churches played a key role in this process of colonization.

Today, if all the African countries are nominally independent—do they not have a government, a territory, and are they not recognized by other nations and do they not enjoy the outward signs of sovereignty?—they do not yet control their destiny, and nowhere is this more true than in education. This has led Wa Thiong'o (1986) to argue that:

Economic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control. To control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others. For colonialism, this involved two aspects of the same process: the destruction or the deliberate undervaluing of a people's culture, their art, dances, religions, history, geography, education, orature and literature, and the conscious elevation of the language of the colonizer. (p. 16)

In this paper about education in Senegal and Burkina Faso, the authors, nationals of the two countries, look at some structural changes that take place in the postcolonial era. In effect, the neoliberal project in education is compounding an already heavy colonial legacy. The education reforms initiated by international institutions with structural adjustment programs and globally mandated national education development plans are impinging on the education systems. These developments have had tremendous effects on the sovereignty of the two societies.