

World Crisis and the Tasks of Progressive Educators

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IN THE November 1974 "Caucus Comments,"¹ we of the Radical Caucus explained "who we are and where we are going." As stated there we operate on the following principles: That the United States is organized on a class basis; that its institutions are generally run by and in the interest of a small minority of people who either own or manage most of the productive capacity and wealth of the country; that this small ruling class makes decisions in its own interest and for its own profit at the expense of the majority; that schools play a critical role in teaching the ideologies and behaviors that maintain the class system; and that educators are faced with a choice—either serve the ruling class or actively struggle against it.

In this article we will examine the current conditions arising from the class system and the implications of these conditions for curriculum workers.

¹Alex Molnar and John S. Mann for the Radical Caucus. "To Serve the Interests of the Masses." Caucus Comments. *Educational Leadership* 32 (2): 147-50; November 1974.

Should school people isolate themselves from social motion and social struggle? This statement by the Radical Caucus holds that, for their own good and that of society, they dare not do so.

By the time you read this, we may have been or may be currently involved in another war in the Middle East. As we write in January, war appears eventual if not imminent. Whereas many once thought that the Arab-Israeli wars were semi-religious wars over national boundaries and security, it is clear today that the stakes have gone up—*way up!* The contradiction of inter-imperialist rivalry has sharpened. Consequently, the stakes (oil, finance capital, and expandable markets) are so high that their ultimate disposition is critical to the interests of every imperialist power.

The international struggle, as a part of the contradictions between capital and labor and between the imperialist powers and the developing nations, has intensified. World capitalism is in a state of crisis. In a time of

crisis for the ruling class, conditions for the working class and poor people deteriorate. The class interests of the ruling minority stand in opposition to the interests of working class and poor people.

Struggle for Control

The class imperative of the owners and managers with respect to labor is control. In "good times" control is most effective when least exercised (that is, when least obvious to and reacted against by those controlled). But in crisis, as working-living conditions deteriorate and the militancy of the exploited rises, control becomes more blatant. In "good times" resistance is literally bought off. The divisive tactic of consumption is the ruling class "remedy" for exploitation on the job. In hard times, however, more and more people find the "remedy" out of reach. Some discover it to be the bribe that it is. Resistance to the exploitation and control increases. For the ruling minority, what was a matter of maintaining control now becomes a question of strengthening control.

Strengthening control means: first, keeping the working class divided; second, bleeding those least able and likely to resist (the poor); third, the acceptance of short-run financial losses in order to maintain and build long-run power.

The primary ruling class tactic for keeping the working class divided is racism. Racism is a class phenomenon, not a biological one. Racist practices and propaganda are increasing: the massive layoffs of blacks in steel and auto industries reflect the massive unemployment of minorities in general; Saxbe and certain "union misleaders" have called for and we are seeing implemented a program of deportation of "aliens"; college tuition increases are accompanied by financial aid cutbacks; Jensen, Shockley, Herrnstein and the like are receiving wide hearing and strong financial support to push a racist ideology; the Boston school fight is pushed as a black vs. white fight. But, as reality progresses dialectically, we also see the rise of anti-racist struggles. The racist campaign can be defeated.

The poor have no slack in their budgets to make up for increases in the cost of living. There is a moratorium on funds for domestic programs while billions of dollars are going for a new airplane. HEW continues to be cut. Ford would price food stamps out of the reach of those who need them most, and raise the price of gasoline so they couldn't get to the grocery store anyway. With the backs of the poor against the wall, police harassment and brutality become necessary to keep the lid on. But the poor, their democratic rights disregarded, unable to make ends meet, and with things looking worse down the road are beginning to fight back.

Unemployment, a consequence of overproduction and a natural law of capitalism, is an example of the acceptance of short-run financial losses to maintain long-run power. The competition for jobs in conjunction with the increased racist agitation furthers the division of the workers. In spite of the illusion of adequate unemployment benefits and the fact that those still working are less likely to resist the speed-ups which are ordered, workers are not taking the heightened job insecurity lying down. Again, dialectically, these conditions promote working class consciousness and militancy.

When we look at these conditions as a whole, there is an absolute mandate for us all to help stem the tide of further repression, loss of jobs, and of approaching war. Fascism (yes, "Even in America") approaches gradually, slyly, in just such a pattern as presented above.

In a Crucial Position

In the face of such an ominous threat educators are in a crucial position. As we stated in the beginning, educators might well serve the interests of the exploiting oppressor class by not actively combating the forces of repression. The Radical Caucus is striving to alert ASCD to the dangers facing the working class and, inevitably, the middle class as well. The Radical Caucus sees that schools can serve as one vehicle for the protection of the democratic rights of the people. What

then are the tasks facing teachers and curriculum workers?

First, make concrete connections with the working class because it is the most exploited and has the most to gain by struggling against the loss of its democratic rights and its right to a living wage. Second, develop curricula which give working class children their history. Third, combat State repression by working for reforms and by disseminating information about the often subtle attack on the democratic rights of the people. How specifically can these three tasks be accomplished?

Connection with the working class can be made at several different levels:

1. Educators can observe their own relation to the ruling class and join in the struggle to better their own working conditions. Widespread unemployment and poor working conditions for teachers (and Ph.D.'s as well) are making it clearer to educators that they are not in any sort of privileged position. They are suffering the same kinds of exploitation that other working people endure. Concretely, joining together in a union or in a professional organization to struggle for better working conditions develops a social consciousness in educators—by that we mean a uniting of interests with the working class against exploitation.

2. Educators must join together to take stands on labor union struggles, on unemployment, and on threats to workers in their towns and cities. While working people need the support of the educational community, the reverse is just as true. Education workers are subject to the same attacks on their livelihoods. Support from the whole working class bolsters their strength.

3. While joining working class struggles, it is at the same time incumbent upon educators to teach people about the divisive tactics of the ruling class. Teachers and curriculum workers must unite around issues that harm or divide the working class such as the struggle over busing. Teachers have much to learn from those issues, but cannot forget that they have much to teach that can help unify the class. They can, for instance,

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teach that "racism" is not something born in white people's heads, but is part of the ideology of the class which wants to keep people divided against each other—"divide and conquer" is the strategy of the ruling class.

The second task for educators is to give working class children their history—notably absent from school curricula. That history includes struggles for labor unions, against imperialist wars, against exploitation of women and children, struggles for the rights of national minorities, and against brutal exploitation by those who strive for profit at whatever cost to human life. There is a long history that is denied us in our country. Knowledge of that history puts power in the hands of the people because it gives them orientation, teaches them strategy and tactics, and unites them with their class—past, present, and future.

The third task is to combat State repression by working for reforms and by disseminating

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nating information about the often subtle attacks on the democratic rights of the people:

1. The attack on jobs hits heaviest on national minorities and women. They are the first to lose their jobs so that white male workers feel it last—another method of reinforcing the *implanted* idea of white male supremacy. Teachers and professors are losing their jobs, too. When they begin the fight for jobs, such as calling for full employment under the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (Public Law #93-203, which guarantees federal jobs in areas where official unemployment is above 6.5 percent), they must include in that call a demand for equal rights for national minorities and women.

2. Because the threat of war is so imminent, educators must unite with serious anti-war motion in their communities and take leadership in such motion as well. At the same time their classrooms should be sources of information about recent wars, why they were fought, and how people are being prepared by the ruling class to go to war again.

Once educators have begun to consolidate their interests with the working class and have begun to learn the history of the class, the further concrete directions they can take in struggling against State repression will become apparent. For instance, in one of the authors' home states the governor announced plans to set up a State Central Intelligence Agency and if any public official in law enforcement openly disagreed with such a plan, he or she would be fired. Teachers and curriculum workers must join forces against such repressive measures.

People who teach are generally able to isolate themselves from social motion and social struggle. In so doing they are helping send millions of lives into exploitation of one form or another in service to a brutal ruling class.

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