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MARXISM AND EDUCATION: The Role of Education in the Class Struggle

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Abstract:

In capitalism, Marxism analyzes the inequality of class systems alongside education, understanding both as subordinate life forms within the capitalist framework. Education perpetuates class divides by providing access to the lower levels of schooling based on parental socioeconomic status. However, it can also promote social revolutions and reforms. Their model of critique provides a cohesive framework through which social inequalities may be addressed. Using dialectical reconstructions, this study demonstrates how education

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reproduces the control mechanisms of the dominant social group, along with the redistributing systems, which revolve around the core of the class struggle towards leveling conflicts. Also, the guiding document discusses how education becomes the means of bringing about changes toward social justice.

Keywords: Marxism, education, class struggle, social equality, socialism.

1. Introduction

As a revolutionary theory, Marxism analyzes society using dialectics and raises the issue regarding the place of education a social institution in reproducing or transforming the class system (Allman, P., 2019). For Marx, education is not only a channel of transmitting and receiving knowledge but also a kind of ideological combat in which the system works either to support, maintain, or subjugate the ruling class and its values and power. Often, in capitalist societies, education serves the interests of the bourgeoisie and reproduces wholly exploitative and unequal relations through the curriculum, methods of instruction, and organization of teaching and schools (Hill, D., Greaves, N. M., & Maisuria, A., 2012). Nevertheless, Marx also perceived education as one of the means by which consciousness is raised among the proletariat, organized, and struggled towards the construction of a classless society that extends social equality for all. In an effort to address the problem of the link between education and class struggle, the article sets forth the following objectives: (1) study the ways in which education in capitalist society assists in perpetuating

the dominance of the ruling class; (2) analyze education in its power to create class consciousness and socialism; (3) evaluate the role of education in relation to equality; (4) explain the difficulties of applying the socialist model of education. Using these objectives, the document attempts to attend to the main query: In what ways can schooling not only mirror stratification but also function as an impetus to transcend social inequity?

To achieve the above goals, the paper uses dialectical and historical analysis, the two pillars of Marx's theory. The dialectical method helps to consider education as a social phenomenon associated with class conflict, while the historical method allows the analysis of the development of education through the different stages of production relations. By combining theory and practice, the paper not only stops at analyzing theory but also examines the practical applications of Marx's thought in educational reform.

This research context is especially important in today's era, when social inequality and class differentiation are increasing globally. Education, which is seen as a tool to enhance knowledge and opportunity, is often dominated by the economic and political interests of the ruling class. Meanwhile, socialist movements continue to struggle to reshape education as a means of human liberation. This research not only contributes to elucidating Marx's thought on education, but also opens up new directions for designing an education system that serves justice and social progress. Thereby, the article emphasizes that education can only promote equality when it is placed in the context of class struggle to eradicate exploitation and injustice.

2. Theoretical basis

Marxism draws its basis from the dialectical materialist and historical materialist method which considers socialism an upbringing that cover the entirety of social phenomena, like education, as directly linked to economy activities and relations of production. Following this stance, infrastructure is the only aspect that forms reason for why education exists and remains intact schools, reflecting ruling class interests. In a Capitalist society, education reproduces and reproduces the labor force as well the bourgeois ideology which serves capitalism. But it was also argued by Marx that education could be used for increasing class consciouness.

Marx's view of education is built on three basic principles: Education as an ideological tool: Education in class society teaches subservient values and civilization as it is aimed at serving ruling class values. Education and Labor: Academics blend with skilled labor and political consciousness in a single person different from capitalist's workforce "production line" from a unit. Education and revolution: It can be used in class politics, organizing, and building new society with weight toward class concisoucsness activists.

These principles set the groundwork for examining the simultaneous functions of education: as a vehicle for inequality and, inversely, as an agent for change. This paper intends to apply these principles to study the functioning of education within the capitalist society and its possibilities under socialism.

3. Education in Capitalist Society: A Tool for Maintaining Class Structure

3.1. Education as an ideological tool

In a capitalist society, education is one of the constituent parts of the ideological apparatus, disseminating curricular values conducive to the reproduction of class society (Mnguni, M. H., 1998). Education does not just transmit skills; it perpetuates inequality. Education does not only impart knowledge; it requires students to pass through a multi-step social reproduction process, induce them to take up their respective places in the hierarchy. Subjects like economics, history, and literature are often employed to popularize individualism, free market capitalism, and the ruling class while concealing the exploitative relations of production that underline the capitalistic society.

For instance, the existing South African economic system is taught to students as a success story based on individual efforts and competition without considering structural realities like levels of wealth or the power dynamics involved (Mouton, N., Louw, G. P., & Strydom, G., 2013). Excerpted accounts of History tend to glorify capitalist entrepreneurs and leaders from the perspective of the bourgeoisie, and downplay or completely neglect the plight of the working class. Even in primary school, students are conditioned with value systems, such as discipline, submission, or deference to superiors that socializes them into obedient wage laborers in the capitalist economy system. These teachings extend beyond mere academic subjects and into after-

school activities like contests- which are framed as competition, practicing the exact opposite of collaboration and cooperation.

The differentiation in education also reflects class ideology. Children from working families often attend public schools that lack resources, with a curriculum that focuses on basic skills, preparing them for simple work. In contrast, bourgeois children have access to elite private schools, where creative thinking and leadership skills are developed. This inequality is not accidental but the result of an education system designed to maintain class gaps. Education, therefore, not only spreads bourgeois ideology, but also reproduces the power structure, making it difficult for students from the working class to have the opportunity to advance socially. Over time, this system deepened class polarization, turning education into a tool to block the revolutionary potential of the proletariat.

3.2. Reproduction of the workforce

Education in a capitalist society plays an important role in training the workforce in accordance with the needs of the capitalist economy, thereby maintaining the class structure (Olssen, M., 2006). The education system divides students into different groups based on their abilities and economic circumstances, preparing them for specific roles in the production system. Some are trained to become simple workers, while others are prepared to work as managers, engineers, or intellectuals in the service of the interests of the bourgeoisie.

Apprenticeships and technical education programs focus on equipping practical skills, such as operating machinery or working in an office, in order to meet the needs of industries.

However, this process does not stop at imparting skills, but also shapes students' mindsets so that they accept their role in the exploitative system. Students are taught that work is a means of survival, not a creative or liberating activity. Values such as efficiency, productivity, and competition are emphasized, turning them into "cogs" in the capitalist machine without encouraging critical thinking about the fairness of the system.

Inequity in education systems perpetuates class disparity. Many working class students are streamed into entry-level training apprenticeship pathways that do not lead to further learning or higher education (Klatt, M., Clarke, K., & Dulfer, N., 2017). On the other hand, children of the bourgeois are schooled to pursue thought-intensive areas like law, economics, and advanced technologies. The differences, however, extend beyond the content of the syllabus; there are disparities in the learning environment. Schools in disadvantaged neighborhoods lack qualified teachers and adequate facilities, while private schools offer optimal learning conditions. Consequently, education systematically organizes the classed workforce seeking to achieve social mobility only to limit access to the opportunity of free market systems. This exploitation results in the working class being trapped in a cycle of diminishing resources and perpetual subservience. In this manner, the system enabled the bourgeois to consolidate control.

3.3. Education and Alienation

According to Marxism, alienation is the phenomenon of people being detached from their creative nature and

community, and education in capitalist society contributes to this process (Aksakalli, A., 2025). Instead of developing a comprehensive human being, capitalist education turns students into tools for production, consolidates class structures, and undermines revolutionary potential. Students are detached from the creative learning process when knowledge is conveyed as information to be memorized, rather than a journey of liberating discovery.

In the classroom, students often have to follow rigid rules, like memorizing or completing sample assignments, leading to a disconnect from the true meaning of knowledge (Johnson, L., 2015). Teachers, under pressure from the system, become imparters of knowledge rather than spark creative thinking. Exams and rankings add to competitive pressure, causing students to see learning as a race for a place in the workforce, rather than a process of personal development.

The consequence of this alienation is that students lose their connection to themselves, to their community, and to the value of labor. Education does not encourage them to question social inequality or the exploitative nature of capital, but instead teaches them to accept their place in the system. For example, students from the working class are often oriented to see simple work as fate, while dreams of social advancement are limited by structural barriers. This alienation not only reinforces class inequality but also weakens revolutionary consciousness, when the working class is not equipped with critical thinking to challenge the system. Therefore, education in capitalist society becomes a tool to prevent human emancipation and maintain the power of the bourgeoisie.

4. Education in Socialism: A Tool to Challenge Class Structures

4.1. Education and raising class consciousness

Socialism transforms education so that it becomes an instrument for developing class awareness among the proletariat and confronting the capitalist system (Harrington, M., 2011). In Marxism, class consciousness does not arise spontaneously. Instead, it emerges as a result of education that awakens a person to their historical consciousness and to their duty of dismantling the exploitative system. Socialist education goes beyond imparting knowledge; it instills a revolutionary zeal in the students to actively partake in constructing a classless society.

The curriculum is focused on studying the capitalist system, its injustices, and the sociological, production, and class conflict dynamics of the capitalist system. History, for instance, is not just about the narration of events but the highlighting of significant class struggles such as the 19th century workers' movements and socialist revolutions. And in philosophy and political economy, there are lessons on the internal contradictions of capitalism such as in the realm of labor and capital, or the increasing concentration of wealth among a few. Students are taught not only to learn these concepts theoretically but to actively engage with these concepts in their daily lives and recognize social injustices around them.

Socialist education also encourages critical thinking, helping students question bourgeois values such as individualism, consumption, or competition (Crowley, D., &

Reid, S. E. (Eds.), 2010). Instead, they are instructed to appreciate solidarity, social responsibility, and collective spirit. Extracurricular activities, like group discussions on social issues or community movement participation, reinforce class consciousness by connecting theory with practical action. Over time, education became the basis for the proletariat not only to understand oppression but also to organize the struggle to abolish it. Class consciousness is formed not only as a perception but also as a preparation for revolutionary action, thereby breaking the bourgeois power structure and paving the way for a more just society.

4.2. Education that combines labor and academia

A core tenet of socialist education is the combination of academia and labor, which aims to develop a holistic human being and challenge class divisions in capitalist society (Cole, M., 2007). In the capitalist system, intellectual labor and manual labor are separated, with education focused on training students for specific roles: intellectuals for the bourgeoisie, workers for the working class. In contrast, socialist education seeks to remove this barrier by integrating productive labor into the curriculum, helping students understand the value of labor and its role in building society.

For example, students can engage in practical activities such as farming, industrial production, or community management, in parallel with learning theory in science, literature, or philosophy. These experiences not only equip students with practical skills, but also help students realize that labor is the foundation of all social values, not a tool for exploitation. Agriculture classes can teach how to optimize

food production, while community projects help students develop organizational and cooperative skills. These activities break the notion that manual labor is less valuable than mental labor, thereby eliminating class prejudice.

The combination of work and academics also encourages students to develop creative thinking and social responsibility. Instead of memorizing, they are encouraged to solve practical problems, such as improving living conditions in the community or designing sustainable projects. Teachers play a guiding role, helping students associate theoretical knowledge with labor practice. Over time, this educational model not only enhances skills but also strengthens class consciousness, as students realize that collective labor is the key to building a society that is no longer exploitative. By integrating labor into education, socialism creates a generation that is not only knowledgeable but also willing to fight for the elimination of class inequality.

4.3. Education and social equality

Education in socialism is designed to promote social equality, remove class barriers, and empower every individual to participate fully in community life. In capitalist society, education differentiates students based on class origin, with bourgeois children having access to elite schools, while the working class is confined to deprived institutions. In contrast, socialist education ensures that every child, regardless of background, has access to free, high-quality education, thereby disrupting the inherently unequal structure of capitalist society.

Equality in education lies not only in access opportunities but also in teaching content. The socialist curriculum removes content that consolidates class power, such as glorifying individualism or concealing exploitation. Instead, it emphasizes collective values, equity, and social responsibility. For example, literature may focus on works that reflect the struggles of the working class, while social sciences explore solutions to global inequality. This content helps students realize that inequality is not natural but a product of the class system, thereby encouraging them to take action to change.

Socialist education also focuses on empowering oppressed groups, such as women, ethnic minorities, and the working class. Special education programs are designed to support these groups, providing them with the skills and knowledge to overcome historical barriers. For example, women may be encouraged to study engineering or leadership disciplines, while minority communities are supported to preserve culture in tandem with access to modern education. These efforts not only promote equality but also build an inclusive society where every individual has a voice. Thereby, education becomes a tool to break the class structure, creating conditions for a society where there is no longer injustice, where knowledge and opportunities are shared fairly.

5. Challenges in the implementation of socialist education

One of the biggest challenges in implementing the socialist education model is fierce resistance from the bourgeoisie and conservative forces. In a capitalist society, education is an important tool for maintaining class power,

which is tightly controlled through funding, curriculum development, and management appointments. Any attempt to reorient education toward socialism, emphasizing class consciousness or social equality, faces a strong reaction from interest groups attached to the current order.

This resistance manifests itself in many forms. Capitalist organizations can cut budgets for schools that introduce revolutionary content into teaching, or pressure them to fire progressive-minded teachers. The bourgeois media often distorts the meaning of socialist education, associating it with negative labels such as "extreme" or "sabotage", reducing public support. For example, when programs on the history of labor struggle are proposed, they are easily criticized as propaganda, even if the goal is only to help students better understand social inequality.

To overcome this challenge, the proletariat needs to be well organized, not only in the field of education but also in political and economic movements. Gaining control of the education system requires the involvement of labor organizations, trade unions, and the broad socialist movement. However, the process was not simple, as the bourgeoisie had superior financial resources and political power. This resistance not only slows down the reform process but also raises questions about the feasibility of socialist education in the context of the still imbalance of class power. Therefore, socialist education can only succeed when it goes hand in hand with a comprehensive revolution, changing both the economic base and the ideological upper strata of society.

The second challenge in the implementation of socialist education is the lack of resources and infrastructure, especially in developing countries or during the transition to socialism. Building an equitable, universal, and labor-integrated education system requires significant investment in schools, teachers, teaching materials, and facilities. However, many countries face financial difficulties, making meeting these needs a complex problem.

The socialist education model requires practice facilities such as workshops, learning farms, or community centers to integrate labor into the curriculum. But not every country can afford to build these facilities, especially in rural or impoverished areas. Compiling new textbooks, designing practical activities, and deploying them on a large scale is a major challenge when resources are limited. Lack of infrastructure not only slows down the reform process, but can also reduce public confidence in socialist education, when they do not see real changes. To overcome this, it is necessary to give strategic priority to education in national development plans, and mobilize community participation to build sustainable learning facilities and materials.

6. Discussion

From the point of view of Marxism, education has the potential to be a powerful driving force for promoting social equality, but this potential can only be promoted when education is placed in the context of class struggle to eliminate exploitation and injustice. In capitalist societies, education often reinforces inequality by reproducing class structures and

spreading bourgeois ideology, shaping students' thinking towards accepting the current social order. In socialism, by contrast, education can break down class barriers, empower the working class, raise revolutionary consciousness, and contribute to building a society free from injustice. However, for education to truly become a tool for promoting equality, it needs to meet a specific set of conditions and go hand in hand with fundamental changes in the economic and political structure of society.

First of all, education must be provided free and universal to ensure that every individual, regardless of class, gender, or ethnicity, has access to knowledge. In capitalist societies, education is often differentiated by class, with bourgeois children being educated in elite schools, while the working class is confined to resource-poor institutions. This inequality not only limits opportunities but also reinforces the ideology that success depends on class privilege rather than individual effort. In contrast, socialist education removes financial barriers, ensuring that every child is educated in a high-quality environment. For example, free education programs can include both academics and practical skills, helping students from all backgrounds develop holistically without being limited by background. Equal access is not only a matter of equity, but also the first step to breaking down the class structure, when knowledge becomes the common property of the whole society instead of the monopoly of a minority.

Second, the curriculum content should be revolutionary, focusing on the analysis of social inequality and

encouraging collective values rather than reinforcing bourgeois ideology. In capitalist societies, textbooks and lectures often glorify individualism, the free market, and the power of the ruling class, concealing the exploitative nature of the relations of production. In contrast, socialist education should help students realize that inequality is not natural but a product of the class system. Subjects such as history should emphasize the struggles of the working class, from workers' movements to socialist revolutions, so that students understand their role in changing society. Similarly, social science subjects can analyze the contradiction between labor and capital, helping students realize that justice is only achieved through collective struggle. Revolutionary content not only provides knowledge but also arouses class consciousness, turning students into individuals who actively participate in the process of building a society free of injustice.

Third, progressive teaching methods are a key factor for education to promote equality. In a capitalist society, teaching is often based on memorization, competitive exams, and rankings, putting pressure on students to see learning as a personal race. In contrast, socialist education should encourage critical, creative, and collaborative thinking. Teachers should play a guiding role, helping students ask questions about social issues and find collective solutions. For example, group assignments on community improvement or discussing inequality can help students develop a sense of solidarity and social responsibility. Progressive teaching methods not only equip students with knowledge, but also build revolutionary thinking, helping students realize that they can change the

world through collective action. This is especially important for disrupting bourgeois values such as competition or individualism, which prevent the unity of the working class.

Finally, the combination of academics and work is an indispensable condition for education to promote equality. In capitalist society, mental labor and manual labor are separated, with education orienting students into fixed roles according to class. Socialist education overcomes this by integrating productive labor into the curriculum, helping students understand the value of all types of work. For example, students may be involved in farming, manufacturing, or community management, thereby realizing that labor is the foundation of society, not a tool for exploitation. This combination not only erases labor prejudices but also breaks down class barriers, when every individual is equipped with both knowledge and practical skills to contribute to society.

However, meeting these conditions requires a comprehensive revolution, not only in education but also in economic and political structures. Education cannot eliminate inequality on its own if the economy remains based on labor exploitation. In capitalist societies, educational reform efforts, such as the introduction of content on labor history or critical thinking, are often limited by the power of the ruling class. For example, teachers may be pressured to follow a curriculum that caters to the labor market, rather than encouraging students to question inequality. For education to truly promote equality, it needs the support of a broad revolutionary movement, capable of overthrowing the bourgeoisie and restructuring society in a socialist direction. Only when the economic base is transformed

can education reach its full potential, becoming the driving force for building a classless society where knowledge and opportunities are shared equally for all.

7. Conclusion

Marxism provides a powerful lens through which to understand the role of education in the class struggle. In capitalist society, education is a tool for maintaining inequality, reproducing class structure and bourgeois ideology. In socialism, however, education can become a weapon for the proletariat to raise its consciousness, organize revolution, and build an equal society. To achieve this goal, education needs to be reoriented towards free, universal, and revolutionary content, and at the same time integrate labor for comprehensive human development.

The biggest challenge is resistance from the ruling class and resource constraints during the transition. However, as Marxism emphasizes, education is inseparable from the class struggle. Only when the proletariat gains control and restructures society can education truly become the driving force for social equality. In the current context, these ideas are still valuable, encouraging us to think about how education can serve justice and social progress.

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