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Revolutionary Thought and Action Against Capital and Empire

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David Harvey is, in my view, the most widely read academic taking on the core issues of our time. His critique of perpetual war and booming inequality is met with the potential for a mass, class conscious, integrated, activist movement for equality and justice. In *A Brief History of Neo-Liberalism*, Harvey (2005) called for a new “New Deal,” to overcome the maneuvers of the George W. Bush administration. Promoting what he called “New Deal” imperialism, Harvey (2003) wrote: “There are, of course, far more radical solutions lurking in the wings, but the construction of a new ‘New Deal’ led by the United States and Europe, both domestically and internationally ... is surely enough to fight for in the present conjuncture” (p. 210). Here, neo-liberalism means that there is something aberrant or new about capitalism and empire; that the rush to imperialist war, capitalist exploitation, fascism, and mysticism can be reversed by protecting a former version of the capitalist state. It harkens back to better days, which never existed.

Later, in 2010, Harvey published *The Enigma of Capital and the Crises of Capitalism*. There, he reversed himself and suggested that the masks of capital must be “unraveled,” as a step toward seizing state power (p. 256). That’s some reversal. But not quite enough.

The goal of this essay is not a utopian scheme that aims at a far distant tomorrow and refuses to address the necessity to win reforms, or to even defend what is minimally left to poor and working people today. It is, instead, to insist that the term “neo-liberalism,” is misleading, although it is adopted by much of the American and British left, and embraced by the widely read U.S. organization, Rethinking Schools, which dilutes even Harvey’s turn to a “New Deal.” Rethinking Schools routinely targets “neo-liberalism.” The upshot is that the counterfeit left within the teacher unions cannot win and sustain even short term reforms and, moreover; to split the needs of today from the requisite need to transcend capitalism is to lose both.

Education Snared by Capital and Empire

Harvey is, again in my eyes, most read by the academic left and he’s one of the best. Classroom teachers are only dimly aware of his work. Their knowledge comes through the sorting machine that is like an intellectual pyramid, sifting down to the not-so-terribly contradictory reality that is the National Education Association’s (NEA) membership. The NEA is by far the largest union in the de-industrialized U.S. (Gibson, 2010). Within the organization, I have witnessed ten thousand-plus rank and file school workers and NEA members assembled yearly, vote again and again “not to discuss” the empire’s wars, as such a debate might upset the body.

The smaller, more urban American Federation of Teachers (AFT) follows the same path. Like every other union in the U.S., the NEA and the AFT stand firmly in the hands of capital (at

root, exploited labor) and the empire (the requisite search for cheap labor, raw material, markets, and regional control). As we shall see in more detail, NEA and AFT leaders believe in the unity of union leaders with their education-based bosses, with the local, state, and national governments, and with imperialism.

To reiterate: the core issue of our times is the rise of color-coded inequality and the real promise of perpetual war met by the potential of mass class conscious and organized resistance for the clarion call that has driven social movements for centuries: Equality! Revolutionary Equality! In the absence of such a social movement, education remains snared by capital and empire, as we shall see, and resistance merely recreates ignorance and despair—Dark Ages’ barbarism—in slightly new ways.

To abandon both the theory and practice of revolution is to deny science (evolution), philosophy (dialectics into materialism), and history (revolution on revolution to end exploitation, to overcome the Master/Slave relationship, for freedom). In pedagogy, it is those transformative “aha” moments when quantities of effort become qualitatively new knowledge, and passion itself—a cornerstone of any movement for change. To give up even the theory of revolution is to dump the materialist conception of history, replace it with reformist—idealist—fantasies about democracy, which dominates the capitalist state and pretends that capitalism can be softened over time. Even more, it is hoping that imperialism will end by ignoring it or voting it away. It is to deny there is an economic base to today’s society, which has been rooted in exploited labor and the unappeasable quest for cheap labor, raw materials, regional control, and markets. It is to pretend the political world is distinct from the economic, and the rich can be voted out of their money and greed.

Teachers as Agents of the Capitalistic State

For many people, forsaking revolutionary theory is to become what they set out to oppose. They’re instruments of their own oppression. To give up on, at least, the theory of revolution is to guarantee the spiders will feed on our great-grandchildren as their ever-foolish flies. Using works of Marx and Engels, Chalmers Johnson, Lenin, Lukacs, and Luxemburg, I believe it is possible to teach revolution in theory and practice—and survive as an educator. I am a co-founder of the Rouge Forum. We have members from throughout the English-speaking world as well as in Mexico. In practice, the Rouge Forum is the only education-based organization in North America that has, for fifteen years and more, seen class struggle as central to school and society. We are not a revolutionary organization. There may be Rouge Forum members from groups who say they are—and perhaps they are. We have not, however, run from revolution. Indeed, we have investigated its aspects with care, approaching our work from the same perspective as Marx and Engles (1848):

And your education! Is not that also social, and determined by the social conditions under which you educate, by the intervention direct or indirect, of society, by means of schools,...The Communists have not invented the intervention of society in education; they do but seek to alter the character of that intervention, and to rescue education from the influence of the ruling class. (para. 44)

Given the role of imperialist de-industrialization, school is one of the centripetal organizing points of daily U.S. life. There are about 3.9 million school workers organized into the two U.S. unions, the NEA and the AFT. If schools are missions for capitalism and empire; the vast majority of school workers are missionaries.

Teacher work, often wrongly described as professionalism, tracks the same avenues that any job suffers. Teachers, who are really school workers, are not professionals—until the employer gulls them into buying books, supplies, extending hours, “volunteering” weekend work, etc. Teachers are alienated from the processes and products of their work. School workers do not control the curriculum. Indeed, many of them could not operate without a pre-packaged set of textbooks. They have, for twenty years and more, been ordered to proctor high-stakes standardized exams. This is Taylorism in the classroom, since most teachers know these tests measure specific variables (parental income, race, or home language) and amount to child abuse.

Teachers engage in the same war that all workers face: the struggle for jobs. Like any factory worker, “the greatest aid to efficiency is a long line of (people) at the gate” (McChesney & Pickard, 2011). In schools, teachers are estranged from students (grading, tests), from the curriculum (textbooks, regulated curricula), from parents, administrators, and each other (competition for jobs and wages). Consequently, students are particularly alienated, distanced from meaningful struggles for what is true, from freedom, from any remote practice of democracy, from equality. For example, as James Loewen (1995) demonstrated in *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, most of the history, particularly historiography itself, isn’t true.

Teachers work in segregated schools by class first, then by race. This division is a creation of capitalist inequality in accumulated wealth, income, and geography. School workers create surplus value in the sense that they prepare the next generation of workers, they manufacture (real or false) hope, and they participate in schools as huge markets. Markets financed by the monetary value attached to each student. In California, every student is worth about \$6,000 a year, carefully pro-rated hour by hour on daily attendance. Schools are barraged with the “opportunity” to invest in education through purchasing iPads, Chromebooks, buses, architects for buildings, test-prep, etc. Hugely influenced by these market pressures, schools are endemic with corruption. John Deasy, for example, the holder of a fake graduate degree, was appointed superintendent of the Los Angeles School District. He quickly moved to purchase an iPad for every child in the second largest district in the U.S. It was not until more than 20,000 iPads, with no software, had been purchased that it was discovered he had a very close relationship with Apple. He was removed, but never prosecuted. He is one of many school administrators who play musical chairs with short term jobs, earning hundreds of thousands of dollars per year, and claiming their plan is the best education plan around the country.

Capitalistic Schools Drain Freedom

Schooling produces labor power in more ways than one. Teachers and students are routinely commodified. Test results, revered by real estate agents who churn the market, are one example. As with any capitalist relationship, behind compulsory state schooling is violence: truancy laws, threats, fines, and arrests. Alienation, exploitation, and commodification add up to

form reification—these processes are seen as normal and inevitable. Test scores, again, are a glaring example, but so is the daily life of school: bell schedules, the division of labor in history versus science versus language arts, etc.

Schools, unbeknownst to most in higher education and politicians, are part of society. They are, as we shall see in detail, embedded in capital and empire and face the crises that necessarily take place within those systems: upheavals following periodic stagnation in the economy and war. To suggest that the factors described in this paper, necessarily lead to revolution, or even mass resistance, would be to mock history. They do not—as the last twenty years of U.S. schooling demonstrates. On the face of it, the following terms could easily be applied to the majority of the U.S. teaching force which has done little other than acquiesce to their own, and their students' oppression: cowardly, racist, nationalist, and superstitious. Very few teachers would read from American patriot, Thomas Paine's (1794/95) *Age of Reason*, in a classroom:

The story of the angel announcing what the church calls the immaculate conception is not so much as mentioned in the books ascribed to Mark and John; and is differently related in Matthew and Luke. The former says the angel appeared to Joseph; the latter says it was to Mary; but either Joseph or Mary was the worst evidence that could have been thought of, for it was others that should have testified for them, and not they for themselves. Were any girl that is now with child to say, and even to swear it, that she was gotten with child by a ghost, and that an angel told her so, would she be believed? Certainly she would not. Why, then, are we to believe the same thing of another girl, whom we never saw, told by nobody knows who, nor when, nor where? (Part II, Section 14).

This would not be read for several reasons: too many teachers are mystics themselves, administrators would hear about it and go wild, and parents would go wilder. School workers have no conception of the materialist viewpoint in history. They have unsystematic, often inexplicable, mystical world views. Nor do they see themselves as agents of dramatic social change. However, there are, certainly, many pressures from above. In California, it is illegal to teach favorably about Karl Marx. Hence, labor history's core is out. Reason is also out, and in favor of "tolerance" for all available ontologies, except rational ones. Love, as a matter of sexual pleasure, is largely banned, in favor of teaching fear of sex: AIDS, STDs, etc. Freedom is out, as there is no real freedom practiced in schools. That almost obliterates the key factors of life: love, work, knowledge, and the struggle for truth—freedom. Teachers are trained in mis-education centers and colleges of education, which too often selects against rebels, even intellectuals, and forges the factors of reification.

Nevertheless, some fight back. They matter. There are less than 4,500 members on the closely-held Rouge Forum email list—with no dues, nor a line. But we have held up a beacon for school workers, veterans, parents, students, and others world-wide. From India to Grenada, we continue to shine light on the reality of class struggle. As important, we have been a community of friends. Clearly, we are not enough as yet. In the absence of a revolutionary movement for equality and justice; we are left with savagery.

What Explains Popular Madness in the Empire?

I believe it is more than reasonable to describe the U.S. as a fascist empire when two elements are combined: the declaration of perpetual war under crusader banners in 2001 and the bank and industrial bailouts of 2008. Wars could have ended, but neither can be reversed. The imperfect combination of corporations, government, and militarism is complete. Here, I begin with a discussion of America's role as an agent of the global hysterics.

If you seek barbarized continents, nations, regions, cities, or tribes, look around you: El Salvador, Guatemala, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Mali, Syria, South Sahara, or Detroit, you are inside the heart of darkness itself. Seek the centers of hydrophobic-like barbarism in Washington, D.C. or Moscow or Beijing—the beast-cooks. What produced this reality is part of the investigation into why things are as they are—and what to do—as we are responsible for our own histories. Taken from another side: What created the mass hysterical conversion crisis lurching around the world? Beyond false consciousness, a conversion crisis related to hysteria, is the transference of a mental disorder to physical activity; for example, stress switched to paralysis of a limb. Taken in mass, a hysterical conversion crisis is personified by groups of people who, unable to address the whole of why things are as they are, attack distinct, idiosyncratic, symptoms and thus are unable to find a cure. A clear, current, indicator of this disorder comes from the Pew Research Foundation (2015):

The share of countries with a high or very high level of social hostilities involving religion reached a six-year peak in 2012, according to a new study by the Pew Research Center. A third (33%) of the 198 countries and territories included in the study had high religious hostilities in 2012, up from 29% in 2011 and 20% as of mid-2007. Religious hostilities increased in every major region of the world except the Americas. The sharpest increase was in the Middle East and North Africa, which still is feeling the effects of the 2010-2011 political uprisings known as the Arab Spring. There also was a significant increase in religious hostilities in the Asia-Pacific region, where China edged into the “high” category for the first time. (para. 1)

That is violent, sixth century, pathological mysticism running amok. *Rolling Stone* reporter, Matt Taibbi (2009), calls it, “The Great Derangement, a Terrifying Story of War, Politics, and Religion.” Even further, Reich (1970) in *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, explored the psychological realm, where he located an “emotional plague” in the suppression of sexual pleasure, which sweeps across class, churches, parties, families especially, and related social organizations. I call the reader to interrogate the too-often-ignored examinations of the emergence of fascism as a popular movement in greater depth.

One other, not alternate but additional, element of explanation: there is no left. Nearly all of what is within the “left” has abandoned revolution, except in its hollowest, even reactionary, forms: the Arab Spring, the ultraconservative farces in Egypt and Syria, the Orange revolution (and other Central Intelligence Agency sponsored uprisings now in the Ukraine), the tragedies that came of Russia and the long revolution in China, and the fictional left in the U.S., etc. In the Arab world and elsewhere, it is reasonably clear that masses of people reject U.S. imperialism (if not the draw of U.S. consumerism and culture) and the obvious failures of Soviet and Chinese “socialism,” which is really capitalism with a purportedly benevolent party at the top. ¹ The left

has turned, alternately to Al Qaeda, the Taliban, the Islamic State or ISIS (aka Daesh), savagery, or the fascist nationalism of the Ukraine phony rebel—and often fascist—leadership (Rogan, 2009).² In the U.S., the fake socialist left on one hand, hides its politics, perhaps believing people must be led to revolution by baby steps: first a union, then a caucus, then a book club, and then the party (which keeps revolution a secret). There is no proof people learn like this, and a great deal of evidence to the contrary. On the other hand, the sectarian left stands with bullhorns shouting revolution, refusing to detail the sacrifices and real devastation that any revolution must first create and yet transcend. Environmentalist revolutionaries seem to dismiss the environmental devastation that any revolution would explode and, likely, will be blackmailed by this threat in the future.

The left is also absent from the rule of corporations and its permanence in capitalism. Liberals seek to moderate capitalism by empowering a government that is neither an ally, nor potential ally, but an enemy—the executive committee and armed weapon of the rich. Al Szymanski (1978), more than 35 years ago, described the duties of what is, in fact, monopoly-finance capitalism with a pretense of democratic statehood or a corporate state (bank bailouts, the takeover of the auto industry, and endless wars):

1. To guarantee the accumulation of capital and profit maximization and make it legitimate.
2. Preserve, form, and temper, capitalist class rule.
3. Raise money to fund the state.
4. Guarantee and regulate the labor force.
5. Facilitate commerce.
6. Ensure buying power in the economy.
7. Directly and indirectly subsidize private corporations.
8. State sanction of self-regulation of corporations.
9. Advance the overseas interests of corporations. (p. 198)

In this sense, democracy does not command capital. Democracy submits and atomizes voters to individuals huddled in ballot booths asking capital's favorite question: what about me? Opportunism denies or hides the ideas of Lenin, Marx, and Engels from the people. This thinking purports that government is an armed force designed to protect the interests of one class against another. The state exists as a demonstration that irreconcilable class antagonisms exist. Liberal opportunists want capitalism and empire, without their underpinnings in robbed labor and wars. Rather than a bad social system—capitalism in decay—they identify bad people and ratify evil by repeatedly choosing the lesser; herein, most recently the demagogue, Obama.

There are no significant differences between Republicans and Democrats on the most fundamental issues in the U.S.: endless war and the militarization of all life; bailouts; deportations; greater reliance on deception and force; racist segregation, especially private property; and greater regimentation of schooling. Of course, members of both groups are all nationalists. Sectarianism and opportunism combine to form the fatalistic belief that the world will surely change in ways we desire. Both limit or deny the significance of fully reflective human agency—grasping and changing—the world at its political and economic roots.

Ghost Dancing Against Capitalism and Empire

In the late 1880's and 1890's, despairing Indian tribes, under assault from all angles, took leadership from a "Weather doctor," Wokova, who promised that the Ghost Dance, a circle dance, would restore peace and prosperity for the various tribes. Some enthusiasts apparently believed that the Ghost Dance was a protection against bullets and death (Kehoe, 1989). Over time, the Ghost Dance spread to the Lakota Sioux at Wounded Knee, South Dakota. The U.S. sent federal troops to stop them, against the advice of a former Indian agent who complained that other religious services, similar services, were not prohibited nor threatened.

On December 15, 1890, federal troops opened fire, killing the famous chief, Sitting Bull. Two weeks later, troops killed more than 150 Indians. The Ghost Dance lost its appeal. The Ghost Dance misread why things were as they were and urged a mystical series of tactics disconnected from any reasonable strategy. They lost and were crushed by force. There have been at least five easily recognized Ghost Dances around the world in the last 14 years—and it is more than 100 years later. It appears to me that another one is in the works: the courageous, but headless, Black Lives Matter movement, demonstrating a notable unity of Black, Brown, and White people, and a recognition of uncaring, or racist, authority, but without a clearer grand strategy, the strategy and tactics will be unhinged.

Ghost Dances: Taken one at a time

The first Ghost Dance was, at base, two dances on the same dance floor: the outpouring for war after the superstitious billionaire's terrorist attack of September 11, 2001 and the subsequent idiot invasion of Afghanistan, a war in response to a crime. The flip side of that dance was the mass U.S. demonstrations against the war in Iraq. This effort was carefully steered away from any analysis of capitalism, imperialism, and fascism by the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) and its front, United for Peace and Justice (UFPJ).

Today, those who so favored the wars are exhausted by war—perhaps surprised and disheartened that war is hell—and unwilling to fully probe into Syria or the Ukraine, even knowing their over-stretched empire evaporates beneath their feet. The anti-war side now barely exists. It has no notable numbers, and thanks to the CPUSA and UFPJ, few learned anything of import from their opportunist activities. The CPUSA illustrates the kind of opportunism that sacrifices the needs and goals of real friends and allies for petty advantages about second tier issues.

The second Ghost Dance, the massive outpouring for immigrant rights that involved more than a million people marching on Mayday, 2006—perhaps the biggest one day strike in U.S. history—was quickly demolished by flag-waving nationalism, religion, Democrats, and unionites and later, Obama.

The third was Occupy Wall Street, a mindless yet heady adventure that claimed no Grand Strategy (distant goals like a world of sharing and freedom). To explain, the strategy became the dumbest and loudest shouter in the "people's" mike. There were no leaders, except when spotted by the police. The group pretended to occupy something, only to be swept away with ease.

Occupy Wall Street was destroyed by unionites, Democrats (hand in hand), and some carrots (ballots), and the Obama led police violence.

The fourth Ghost Dance was the anti-tuition fight led by students, despite their class segregation, primarily in California and New York state, but scattered all over the country. The key error of this Dance was the student leaders' failure to recognize the fact that capitalist education has never been public. Their demand to "Defend Public Education" was a call to defend the systematically segregated, stupefying, mis-education of what is now a corporate state. A similar error is made by the demand to "Stop Privatization." Inherent in the "Defend Public Education" or "Save Public Schools" campaign is the nationalist view that we all share a common goal to educate all kids in a democratic society. That's never been the case. It is, though, a good way to make a war popular. The reality of capitalism's and imperialism's domination is evidenced by national investment in militarization and war, rather than education. The U.S. military budget, if we take it at face value, is about 55% of the total national budget, while education spending is averaged at 6%. It is no surprise then, that U.S. military spending is higher than the combined military spending of China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, France, United Kingdom, Germany, Japan, and India (Peterson Foundation, 2014). Today, many college and university campuses are littered with military recruiters, intelligence agencies, and high-tech operations that build military weaponry. High schools and community colleges in poor and working class areas are awash with militarist hustlers distributing materials and patriotic veterans teaching in classrooms. Even more deceptive, the military now poses its mission as "a job, not an adventure" as it moves to recruit women for combat. The deadening salute, "Thank you for your service," is routinely offered to strangers in uniform, despite an awareness for the grander scheme of war and imperialism. Take for example, the fact that many Americans are surprised that Guantanamo is still open and would largely reject the critiques made in the brilliant, yet tragically funny, *Guantanamo Diary* (Slahi, 2015). Instead, many Americans revel in the *American Sniper* culture of militarism and the weak symbolic gestures of baseball players in camouflage and jets flying over football games.

In 1900, in *Reform or Revolution*, Rosa Luxemburg (1900) warned about this move: that the gradual reduction of capitalist exploitation and the extension of social control would be at the forefront. From the other angle, reform again means defense of the corporate state, the merger of business, the military, and the government in creating schools as illusion mills and human munition factories—capitalist education. A second anti-tuition hike error was the failure to merge the leadership from segregated systems like the University of California (the "race horse system" per a former Chancellor, Charlie Reed,) and the "work horse system" of the California State Universities, and the "Holding pens" of the Community Colleges. It was easy to see who was doing most of the "leading," and talking, in the coordinating meetings—UC students, who had the least to lose.

That second-tier demand, "Save Public Schools," worships an apparition. It is the kind of liberalism that aspires to a new master. It also ignores the unpleasant fact that the education agenda is a war agenda: class war and empire wars. To carry the personifications of war a bit further: General William H. McRaven, former head of the terrorist Joint Security Operations Command (at base, a huge assassination squad that helped lose the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq) is now the head of the University of Texas System. Janet Napolitano, former immigration boss

under the demagogue, is now the boss of the University of California System. And General Petraeus, failed general who wrote the half-witted “U.S. Counter Insurgency Manual,” (done better 2000 years earlier by Sun Tzu in *Art of War*) and disgraced CIA top who turned over top-secret material to his paramour and was fired, prosecuted, and wrist-slapped, is now teaching at City University of New York.

And now, the fifth Ghost Dance. As the resistance decays even more, we see the spurious school “test resistance” movement led by the likes of the vacillating reactionary Diane Ravitch, AFT president Randi Weingarten, and NEA boss, Lily Eskelsen Garcia. Ravitch is a god-blessing patriot in her own words. ³ Ravitch, along with other union leaders such as NEA boss, Dennis van Roekel and his successor, Lily Eskelsen-Garcia all helped to write the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB), the *Race to the Top* (RTTT), and the Common Core. Van Roekel and Eskelsen Garcia want the Common Core and tests repaired, as do other liberal groups (Fairtest and Rethinking Schools) who refuse to critique the necessity for greater regimentation of the curriculum. The curriculum, which is always regimented by textbooks, is also a part of capitalism in crisis and an empire evaporating.

Together, Ravitch, Weingarten, and Eskelsen Garcia form the three Mother Superiors of the missions for capitalism. They (as well as the teacher union rank and file) want less testing (warned for a decade, school workers finally caught on to the logical step of merit pay—the most grotesque opportunism). They also insist they want to “defend public schools,” which really means—“save my job—I already proved I will conduct child abuse (racist high-stakes exams) to keep it”—when (again) capitalist schooling has never been public but always segregated by class and race.

The duplicity of NEA’s leadership became glaringly clear when in 2014 the NEA representative assembly of over 9,000 members gathered in Denver and voted by a wide margin to demand the resignation of Obama’s Education Secretary, Arne Duncan. Days later, Eskelsen Garcia met with Duncan, hugged him, and called him, “a good man.”

What will come of this last and smallest Ghost Dance? They will lose, just like their predecessors (and the 19th century tragedy that gave rise to the term). Even if they win; they lose. Capitalist schooling can easily appropriate John Dewey or Paulo Freire. Freire’s (1970) method, which was ostensibly created to oppose “banking education” is used by banks’ training programs. The people the reformers misled will learn nothing significant about grand strategy, tactics, or even the most rudimentary methods of doing criticism. The last dullard to help lead the “test resistance” crowd, part of which is now claiming the “Patriotic” banner, derisively called the Common Core “socialistic” (not National Socialism).

Weak and Defeated “Radicals”: Echoes of the Ghost Dance

A self-described “radical,” Alex Caputo Peal, was recently elected president of Los Angeles’ local teachers union, the second largest in the U.S. In Detroit, a long-time teacher, Steve Conn, a member of By Any Means Necessary, a front for the Trotskyist Revolutionary Workers League, finally won the Detroit Federation of Teachers’ presidency, after more than five attempts. Conn courageously led the Detroit teachers’ wildcat strike of 1999, but was repeatedly cheated out of leadership positions for the remaining years (Gibson, 1999). In a

Detroit Federation Teacher recount vote, Conn won election by four ballots, 621 to 617 with about one quarter of the members voting. Conn may find himself sandbagged by a dedicated, entirely reactionary, opposition and an apathetic, despairing rank and file, accustomed only to defeat. Conn is probably the most outspoken of the new elects. We shall see how he overcomes the countless obstacles he, and the people of Detroit face. In September 2015, less than 8 months after being elected, Conn was impeached. He lost an internal union trial.

In the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), Karen Lewis (a moderate posing as a radical), won election against the past notorious sellout caucus. Lewis led a brief strike, then urged the teachers to return to work under what she posed as a good contract, a victory. Mayor Rahm Emanuel, an Obama foot-soldier, laid off hundreds of teachers with a good deal of noise, but no direct action, from the CTU, an AFT affiliate. Now, Lewis' health forced her to step away from her position which today is held by Jesse Sharkey, a member of the International Socialists, another Trotskyist sect. Sharkey led CTU's drive to back Chuy Garcia against incumbent Emanuel in a mayoral election, where less than 35% of Chicagoans voted. Garcia is a long-time Democratic Party functionary. Nevertheless, Sharkey and the CTU helped Garcia win enough votes to cause a run-off. Sharkey declared that Garcia would win, "changing Chicago politics forever." In the end, Chuy Garcia lost.

In Milwaukee, Bob Peterson, a key leader of Rethinking Schools, closely tied to the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), is now the president of his union. Peterson (2015) proposed that tactical work through coalitions with parents and related community groups, for example in Chicago, is key to their efforts. Among his coalition partners are the usual suspects: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Parents For Public (sic) Schools, and others. Peterson (2015) wants to enhance teacher "Professionalism".⁴ Yet, to beat this dead horse to death, teaching was never a profession. School workers do not set their hours, wages, methods of work, the curriculum, and are bombarded with tests. It is a working class job. Professionalism is an elitist dodge that allows, for example, principals to demand teachers buy supplies, or work hundreds of unpaid hours. Professionalism also allows teachers to see themselves as educated superiors to blue collar workers—the allies they need most. In this, Peterson managed to get his "union," to train teachers on district policy, focus on "student learning outcomes" being a move well within the management box.

Peterson is proud of the union's burgeoning electoral efforts, despite the fact that this was the key union which sought to recall Governor Scott Walker, and having lost this move, then positioned Walker today as a presidential candidate. Rather than a state-wide strike, actions similar to what gave birth to the distorted baby of collective bargaining, unionites in Wisconsin empowered their enemies. Peterson wants to fight "privatization," a second or third level issue, and on those grounds, he fears what amounts to fighting back too hard and speaking out of turn. He firmly noted, "...speaking out can play into the hands of the privatizers as they seek to expand privately run charters (Peterson, 2015, section 7). " The only mention of a strike is historical, about Chicago—not something that would be openly planned in Milwaukee—when it was only strikes, most of them illegal, that won the earliest rights to collective bargaining.

Not surprisingly, Peterson never gets to exactly what his hobbyhorse of "social justice" is. And it is unsurprising that *The Washington Post* so easily carried his work. It is impossible

for any knowledgeable radical or revolutionary to read this series of what seems to be tactics, and not stridently think it is *petty bourgeoisie opportunism with a middle class core*. In this sense, per Marx, he is both a reactionary and a utopian. While many honest and relatively innocent people involved themselves in these Ghost Dances, it remains that each has been led by people in leftist groups who deliberately reject the notion of simply telling people about the easily seen realities of class war and failing empires. The ruling classes see it and worry about the relationship of inequality and uprisings. Even the French worry about inequality on behalf of Americans: Piketty, Goldhammer, and Ganser's (2014) *Capital in the 21st Century*, which unfortunately ends with a request for the rich to give up their riches.

All of these "radicals," have everything in common with the past Ghost Dances:

1. No critique of capitalism and imperialism in their organizing or publications.
2. No analysis of the capitalist state, now a fascist corporate state, in favor of "our democracy."
3. A second tier analysis of the role of racism and sexism—the former development of capitalism and the latter a century's old remnant, still powerful within capital
4. No open declaration of class war or opposition to imperialist war from their official union positions (and in DSA, none at all), which addresses only the distinct, separate parts of a lifeless machine, artificially isolated "facts" that are truly part of a totalizing process,
5. Assuredly, no critique of religion, superstition, which plays a significant role in the world's many, endless wars,
6. All these struggles are designed to remain within parameters set by capital and empire, so any victory, temporary as it may be, is theirs,
7. Hence, support for the system of capital and its decaying U.S. empire—convincing people fundamental change is impossible.

They seek to return to those better days of capitalism—in schools for example—when schools were not segregated by class and race, did not teach lies to children using methods so obscure kids learned not to like to learn. Those would be days when alienation, exploitation, commodity fetishism, reification and imperialism had only the smallest impact, if any, on schools—days which existed only in their minds. Rather, the more vocal of the anti-neo-liberalists want to empower a corporate state. They seek to create more flies to dance on the spider's web. Or, philosophically, they abolish the negation of the bourgeoisie negation.

At base, part of the imitation left lies to people in order to trick them into revolution: to appropriate one favorite Trotskyist term, "putting people in motion," which will somehow make them smart. The lies come from two poles: hiding the reality of capitalism's failures and at the other end, the fact that any kind of social change will cause a great deal of suffering and destruction. Things will not get better fast after a revolution. Indeed, for some time they will get worse. Perhaps this "left" wants to imitate the Bolsheviks who famously gave the bourgeoisie the rope to hang themselves with; then moved to power when the bourgeoisie could not rule. But then, came the Bolshevik failure in quickly restoring capitalism with a purportedly benevolent party at the top. Bolshevism was tricked by the bourgeoisie within its own midst. The phony U.S. left did all it could to prevent the rise of a mass class conscious movement. Hence, the importance of ideas is the ideological battle. On one hand, what defeats men with guns? On the other, what easily understood singular belief holds together a movement that must suffer to win a

better world? Ideas. That is likely to be the only worthwhile lesson of the Arab Spring. That is why the ideological battle is important. The core idea? Equality—true in science and society.

Capitalism, Consumerism, and Consciousness

This ideological battle must be fought in hostile territory. The U.S. is a consumerist, not industrialist society. This is a result of imperialist out-sourcing, stagnating finance capital, and gargantuan debt. Between two-thirds and three-fourths of the economy is rooted in consumption. Culture nests in an economic base, a whole that cannot be ignored. The mass psychological impact of this material reality is this: Industrial society is easily seen as a class war, not as easily recognized as a form of exploitation as slavery, but in the late 18th century, class war was widely admitted. The obvious solidarity of factory work is that everyone must join together to create a product and to control the processes and products of that creation.

Consumerist mass psychology, however, is different. It is truly a war of all on all. *I wish to offer you as little as possible for your product*, and vice versa. It may be the highpoint of human alienation. A consumerist society, which must involve the individualistic thrust to the front, is an even more narcissistic society than what Drs. Jean Twenge and Keith Campbell (2010) noted in *The Narcissism Epidemic* and was also addressed in *Too Big To Fail* (Sorkin, 2009). Twenge & Campbell (2010) suggested that Wall Street inverted the *laissez faire* greed-festival before and after the collapse of 2008.⁵ While class consciousness or its absence is not solely located in an economic base, the undergirding reality has to be a consideration to explain this *Great Derangement* (Taibbi, 2009). Consumerism is, assuredly, contradicted by booming inequality and a huge underclass. The poor can only buy so much, especially with a color-coded two million of them in prison.

The ruling class, which is married to the governing class, engages a top-down ad hoc, make-shift set of short term tactics with plenty of pyrotechnics and little grand strategy. And in the remainder of the people, a “what about me” mass population is especially susceptible to spectacles, despair, and manufactured panics. Mix in the formidable displays of police violence against protestors from Oakland, California to Ferguson, Missouri—ruthless ferocity to be seen by all, tweeted, Youtubed, Facebooked, and televised, probably to not too much consternation of the authorities. Alienation, panic, and manufactured crises generate the space for an increasingly authoritarian society – one that thrives on fear.

Nowhere is this fear more abundantly apparent than in education. In 2009, Susan Harman (former school principal), Robert Apter (Marxist scholar and retired union organizer), and I visited nearly every county in California, meeting with hundreds of school workers, parents, school board members, and community personnel. Our overarching conclusion is that the primary effect of schooling is fear, the result of increasing authoritarianism in most aspects of school life. Nevertheless, Apter and I came to believe that much of that fear is, in fact, an overestimation of the power of school bureaucrats and a lack of courage to act. Fear, in schools and out, has a material footing in the economy. Massive debt, calculating competition for low-wage jobs, widely televised police violence against non-violent innocents, all add up, but in most instances the worst-case scenario in schools is dismissal. Who, of any weighty consequence, has never been fired and/or jailed? All of this predicts why Americans are so easily led into and out of Ghost dances.

The Quisling role of the “labor movement,” as partners of the unified parties of capital, is the war parties. No significant labor boss in the U.S. will state that employers and workers have contradictory interests. This is because they are all steeped in nationalism and the practices of empire (Gibson, 2013). This became glaringly clear in the NEA’s Representative Assembly of 2010, about 10,000 mostly rank and file practicing school workers, voted “not to discuss” the wars as it might disturb the feelings of the attendees. This wasn’t an orchestrated parliamentary trick, it was the raised hands of more than 90% of the room. In 2011, the NEA voted to endorse Obama, despite his *Race to the Top* attacks on school workers and the wars that were destroying so many recent graduates. That school workers are among the last in the U.S. to have fairly decent wages, health benefits, forms of tenure, and pensions is indicative of the empire’s bribe. It creates what Marx and Engels (1848) called the “labor aristocracy.” Engels wrote, “Participation in the world market was and is the economic basis of the English working class’ nullity” (as cited in Hunt, 2011). He wasn’t just pointing to labor “leaders” (as cited in Hunt, 2011).

A massive world army of unemployed people grows, and as this world crisis grows, so does the need of bosses to lower the costs of production. There are but two alternatives, social revolution or destruction. The class struggle now intensifies.⁶

What is a Revolution? It is Reasonable to Teach It.

There are two words in Chinese that describe “revolution.” One word means to dig into and turn over the soil; what is on top is new, but what is below is still there. The other word means to withdraw the mandate from heaven. That is a legitimacy crisis: when the people realize the emperor is a mere mortal, no better than others, has no honor from God, and is indeed, worse, because the ruler has mis-served the people-theft, nepotism, etc. The bourgeoisie itself, therefore, supplies the proletariat with its own elements of political and general education. In other words, it furnishes the proletariat with weapons for fighting the bourgeoisie (Marx & Engels, 1848). Chalmers Johnson was a CIA asset whose work on *Revolutionary Change* (1966) is a benchmark for all similar modern studies.

Revolutionary violence must attack the central seat of power. Decentralized violence often leads to reform. Societies are rooted in coercion, forms of violence, applied inequitably in inequitable societies. When hope vanishes, and people are just scavenging for food, revolution may be at hand (Johnson, 1966).

He also believed that legitimizing the use of force was an important value system within society. After which, change can occur in various forms:

1. External: worldwide communications system, foreign travelers returning, international communist parties, external warfare, etc.
2. Internal: changes of values brought about by intellectual activity, scientific discovery, acceptance of innovations that are not incorporated into “normal” society.
3. Ideology, an alternative value system, plus much more, is key to revolution. In this sense, ideology would mean a program of values, a coherent or at least understandable method of analysis and plans of action: Grand Strategy, strategy, and tactics (Johnson, 1966).

Such an ideology will “supply intellectually and emotionally satisfying explanations of what is wrong with the social system” (as cited in Gibson, n.d.). Therefore, revolutionary ideologies offer a method of thinking that can be applied to critiques and produce a culture that shows how things can change. These ideologies often shift in order to account for its deficiencies as they have been tested by social practices.

Typically, revolutionary ideologies are imminent. That is, they do not argue for postponing change, but seek to hasten it. High degrees of generality or correctness in terms of explanation and practice, means that revolutionary ideologies have the potential spread between and among dissident groups. This may result in growing solidarity. In order to retain power, elites must do two things: recognize disequilibrium and move, convincingly, to act on it. One common method to retain power is to coopt opposition leadership. Revolution is an academic field that gets far too little attention. And, in practice, everything is in place for a dramatic, revolutionary upheaval. But there is no left.

Class Consciousness: Connecting Reason to Power

What, after all, is class consciousness? According to Ron Eyerman (1981), class consciousness is the awareness that one is a part of a social group who engages in common work activity and reproduces a social system. Within this social group are also other individuals who do not have the same interests regarding that system and who do not participate in it in the same manner. Eyerman (1981) continued to posit that class consciousness is an orientation toward political action and an awareness of interests that may be similar or different to one’s own. Finally, class consciousness is an awareness of the social structure that makes these differences real (Eyerman, 1981). Class consciousness implies anti-racism, anti-capitalism, as well as a vision of a better future against which today’s actions can be examined. This is not to simply reduce every question of race, sex, religion, or ethnicity immediately to greed and profits, but it is to say that the war for surplus value has decisive influence in setting up all the social relations of capital. Capitalism, racism, nationalism, sexism, and religion all work together to disguise social problems. That is, capitalism and U.S. forms of unionism are designed, above all, to create a veneer of limited knowledge and to wipe out class consciousness. To date, this process has been successful. Following Eyerman’s (1981) definition, class consciousness has been seen as:

1. A logical and necessary result of the advance of productive forces, that is, when the world is industrialized, people will become class conscious (Kautsky, 1918)
2. An awareness of the whole picture of capital, through the daily bitter experiences that capital must offer the working class (Lukacs, 2000)
3. An offering to working people from organized intellectuals and dedicated activists, especially as crises arise (Lenin, 1916)
4. As workers' spontaneous response to their collective, persistent, problems, as work is always alienating (Glaberman, 1999)⁷
5. Class consciousness has been seen as the natural product of intellectuals produced by the working class itself; organic intellectuals, whose ideas can be more easily accepted, grasped (Freire, 1970).

None of these formulas has worked well so far. Class consciousness, then, is a pedagogical and practical problem that has not been resolved. Its absence plagues the working classes of the world as crises of capitalist inequality, imperialist war, racism, rising irrationalism, international bankruptcies, and militarism make the current situation especially menacing and urgent. The crux of the pedagogical issue goes beyond transcending racist alienation and defeating exploitation. At the heart of the question is the view that people can consciously overcome the master/slave relationship. Yet not recreate it at a new level to forge a new society, a caring community from the wreckage of the old. In the end, can people forge reason from unreason?

Justice does demand organization. Organization requires discipline and that, too, is a problem. It is a contradictory relationship of taking direction, where at the bottom are those who must obey orders from those with the broadest view. In practice, this has meant that those in relatively secret sections of revolutionary organizations have to operate with limited knowledge of all sorts: anonymity or direction for the next steps, which often remain unquestioned. They must grasp the “whole” without knowing many of its revolutionary parts. Lukacs (1968) in *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, locates “imputed consciousness,” among the oppressed as taking corporeal form, bodily form, inside a Marxist party and in his case, the temporarily successful Bolsheviks. That consciousness is then transferred through various forms of educational efforts or propaganda to the exploited. Perhaps consciousness primarily became a one-way, top-down message. For example, within the CPUSA many old members remember the main message as: “Do what you’re told.” Class consciousness must be dialectically pressed to and from organizers to masses of people. Organization must be moral and ethical to win the trust of the masses; otherwise, it would be unwise to offer a prescription that could be applied to every community, detailing the old “what is to be done” question. But direct action (control of workplaces and communities at key choke points), relentless agitation for class consciousness, and, importantly, close personal ties across all of capital’s barriers is key.

Capital has united the world via systems of production, exchange, communications, and exploration and divided the world by class, race, nation, mysticism, and sexism. It is a social system that has far outlived its usefulness. Indeed, everything Chalmers Johnson described as the backdrop for the possibility of revolutionary change is well in place. Capital has nothing left to offer masses of people. Even before the NASDAQ collapse, people with three SUV’s began to notice that such good luck was just not fulfilling. Capital has inverted science, consider the huge scientific advances in weaponry and gas-masking, while 25% of the kids in parts of New York City are cursed with environmental asthma. Capital is attacking all that is beautiful, from rationality to aesthetics—the drooling fundamentalist snake-handling top office-holders who cloak the breasts on statues. But overcoming the processes of capital is going to require a massive change of mind—an urgent change if we are going to go beyond industrialized slaughter.

Changing minds is the daily life of every school worker. School workers are situated at the centripetal organizing point of North America’s de-industrialized life. They do not have to operate the school-to-war pipeline. Indeed, if they begin to recognize the contradiction between why they think they are in capitalist schools, and why elites want them there, perhaps those educators can rescue education from the ruling classes. After which, they can help to expose the false mandate from heaven that offers dishonest and incompetent leaders legitimacy they do not

deserve. War is inevitable within the systems of capital and empire; it is as inevitable as the betrayal of the promises of nationalist liberals in socialist garb. If history is any kind of guide, the lessons of the Second International should be enough.

What we do counts more than ever. There is no guarantee we will win. But we must. That will not happen by simple reasoning. The masters will not adopt the ethics of the slaves. We will win by resisting with a plan to overcome and by learning from our resistance. We can resist to outfox the destruction of reason and wisdom. The core issue of our times is the rise of color-coded inequality and the real promise of perpetual war met by the potential of mass class-conscious resistance for the clarion call that has driven social movements for centuries:

A single-minded aim: Equality! Revolutionary Equality!

We will not be fed willingly, witlessly, to the Spiders.

Death to the Fascists and...

Up the Rebels!

Good luck to our side.

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¹ The Arab Spring began with an accelerator: a Tunisian fruit vender, denied a permit to sell his wares, self-immolated, beginning a series of uprisings that led to the overthrow of the government. Today, the country is in turmoil, suffering religious, tribal, and for-profit wars. Following Tunisia, the U.S., led by Obama, Susan Power, and Susan Rice, backed Muslim fanatics in overthrowing a tame dictator, Ghadaffi, who was for years a U.S. asset. Now, the country is also in turmoil, fighting the same wars as Tunisia. Egypt followed. The U.S. again betrayed a tamed dictator, Hosni Mubarak, who had been funded by the CIA for years and whose military is largely a U.S. creation—the most powerful in the Arab world. Turmoil in Egypt led to the imprisonment of Mubarak and the election of a government under the 100 year old Muslim Brotherhood.

That government was overthrown by the military, thousands jailed and killed, and Mubarak freed. American intelligence simultaneously backed Muslim fanatics, Islamo-fascists, in Syria, again trying to overthrow a tame dictator, “King,” Assad, a secular ally, more or less, of the Russians. The U.S. cooked up accusations that the King had, and used, poison gas. Obama drew a “red line,” around this activity. The Russians intervened and Obama did not act, perhaps because respected journalist, Sy Hersh, revealed that the King had no gas and it was likely the Islamo-fascists who used it. Without going into detail about the demoniac, “crusader,” trumped up war on Iraq, and the earlier attack in Afghanistan, the whole of North Africa, Central-east Africa, Syria, and Iraq, are now hunting grounds for the Islamist’s dream. <http://tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/160156/how-bin-laden-won>

² Rogan, unfortunately, completely misread the Arab Spring, predicting it would begin to offer proof that the Arab people can build democracy, which has yet to be seen. Nevertheless, his analysis of the past, up to 2009, is unsurpassed.

³ For Ravitch’s God-blessing patriotism, see Gibson, R (2010). “The NEA Representative Assembly 2010, A Longer View,” originally published in *Substance News* and online at <http://richgibson.com/NEA-RA2010LongerView.html>

⁴ Peterson maintains a web page with this in the title: “emphasis on the essential links between quality public schools, a vibrant multicultural democracy, and justice for all.” Multi-culturalism became, long ago, a veneer for nationalism. Peterson is also closely linked to the Zinn Educational Project, celebrating the dogmatic pacifist Howard Zinn, whose work rather carefully ruptures the idea of U.S. “democracy,” a fact which his celebrants seem to miss entirely, as they do the fact that he weaves his history around his pacifism. More on Peterson can be accessed online at <http://bob-peterson.blogspot.com/>

⁵ Christopher Lasch (1980) explored the burgeoning problem much earlier in *Culture of Narcissism*. Lasch locates a variety of matters underlying the narcissistic American personality, particularly a pathological fear of being nothing, treated, or not, by meaningless spectacles. His Freudian prescience of an even-more-serious to be is worth noting. Interestingly, Lasch uses Billy Ayers Weatherman sect as a clear indication of a collective narcissistic disorder. Ayers’ life long project has been to destroy class-conscious mass movements with bombs or, later, seeking surcease in grants. Narcissism, in his case, is on point, but second tier. Former Weatherman Mark Rudd has admitted that the sect destroyed the Students for a Democratic Society, on the eve of the biggest outpouring of student activism in 1969/70, by destroying the mailing list.

⁶ Dutt wrote this text on opposition to the Bulgarian, Dimitroff, whose work set the stage for the shift in the Comintern’s line from class against class, to the popular front. Dimitroff’s work is *United Front Against Fascism* online free at <https://archive.org/details/TheUnitedFront>. A functionary, Dutt easily adjusted to the demolition of the “Third Period.” Dutt, R. (1935/1974 second printing). *Fascism and Social Revolution*,” San Francisco, CA: Proletarian Publishers.

⁷ Glaberman was a member of the Johnson-Forrest Tendency. Nevertheless, his insights are worthy.