Marx and the Crisis in Education
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In November last year the Prime Minister, Jim Callaghan, in a speech (significantly) at Ruskin College, initiated the 'Great Debate' on education, now said to be proceeding. I say 'significantly' because it was, of course, at Ruskin College that there took place one of the classic ideological struggles over the content of education—back in 1909. The great issue was whether economics should be taught from the angle of the working class—that is, from that of Marxism—or whether the economic theory purveyed to the adult, mature students from the trade union movement should consist entirely of bourgeois apologetics. The struggle escalated to raise sharply the question of control—whose college was it and who should run it? The outcome is, of course, well known. Following the students' strike there followed, first, the formation of the Plebs League, then the establishment of the Central Labour College, from all of which emerged the National Council of Labour Colleges, which played an important part in labour movement education for very many years.

It is appropriate, then, that Marx himself should intervene in this debate, if only, of necessity, in surrogate form. We meet today to discuss the question of the crisis in education on the anniversary of Karl Marx's death, and it is clear that circumstances have made it an appropriate choice for the Memorial Lecture. Perhaps we can use this opportunity to stand away a little from immediate pressures, to go back to Marx himself to see how he dealt with related issues in his time, and to consider what guidelines we can find applicable to our present predicament.

Marx's works and his activities, therefore, provide us with a standpoint from which an evaluation of the current situation can be made.

But two points should be made at the start. In a single lecture like this, only certain issues can be tackled. It is necessary to select those aspects of Marx's thinking that appear most directly relevant at this moment to contemporary educational issues, leaving many others aside for want of time. Second, I am conscious, given the wealth of material only now becoming easily available to us with the publication of the Collected Works in English, of my inadequacy to take on this task, which can only be regarded as a preliminary clearing of the ground. I very much hope, and indeed it is essential, that these and other aspects of Marx's approach to education will be taken up and developed in a more penetrating way by others in the future.

Economic and Fiscal Crisis

Is there a crisis in education? I suggest there is. It finds expression in three areas. First, in what might be termed the economic, fiscal and administrative area. Second, in the field of ideology; and third, arising from these, in what might generally be termed the political arena—I refer here particularly to the question of control—who does, or should control the schools? Or to put it in another way, To Whom Do Schools Belong?—the title, incidentally, of a book written 30 years ago by an experienced Director of Education who was also a historian.

The instability of capitalism, the impossibility of planning in the light of domination by the market and the anarchic conditions of production, the consequent lack of any overall perspective in terms of social development—all this is reflected in the field of education which is particularly vulnerable to succeeding economic crises. Today the insistent pressure from central and some areas of local government radically to reduce expenditure on education is a direct reflection of the current economic crisis of capitalism—one experienced with special sharpness in this country.

Related to this is the fiscal crisis—epitomised in the financial problems facing local authorities, due
partly to the inadequacy of the rate support grant — the central governments component of educational and other expenditure in support of moneys raised from the rates which, this year, has been cut to 61 per cent of relevant expenditure from 65 per cent last year. Hence the massive cuts being effected by local authorities in their educational budgets; cuts which, it is estimated, "will have catastrophic effects on public services and education in particular". These cuts are felt in the schools and colleges in the form of increased pupil-teacher ratios (or larger classes), reduced capitation grants (covering books, paper, and other resources essential to teaching), reduced welfare services (school meals and milk), and so on. All this is a direct reflection of the instability of capitalism, as well as of its lack of serious concern for the educational welfare of the people.

**Local Government Reorganisation**

But this economic and fiscal crisis is compounded by the effects of local government reorganisation and by the corporate management techniques that came with it. Conceived, perhaps laudably, as a means of ensuring rational use of resources, its objective significance has been to downgrade education and leave it especially vulnerable to further economies and cuts on the part of local Pecksniffs who have always wanted to cut the publicly maintained system of education down to size. There is little doubt that this was its deliberate objective, and that this also was seen as one of the means by which educational development could be curbed. Whatever the truth of that, the system has certainly led to confusion and inefficiency, highlighted in the resignation of the Avon Director of Education on this specific issue at the end of last year.

A group of experienced and leading directors have sharply raised the question as to whether, given these developments, local government can continue to run school systems, and are actively searching for new, to them more satisfactory, means of control which allow for positive developments and responsible democratic management. The labour movement should take note of this as it is an important issue, but the point I want to make here is that the combination of the economic and fiscal crisis with the effects of local government reorganisation enhances the crisis facing education as a whole.

**Ideological Crisis**

This is the context of the crisis—but it goes deeper than this. There have always been ideological disputes in the field of education and, given its importance as a social function, there are always bound to be. But over the last few years these have reached a new level. A characteristic aspect of this is the involvement of the mass media (the popular press and TV) in a big way in what are basically ideological issues, though with clear political overtones. I refer as examples not only to the Black Paper phenomenon (which is specifically ideological), nor to the massive exploitation of Jensen and Eysenck’s fundamentally reactionary ideas on intelligence, race and class, but also to the way the mass media exploited the small-scale research project carried through at Lancaster University by Neville Bennett, and to the exploitation by the press of the Tyndale dispute in London.

These indicate that there is today a sharp conflict over the nature of education and its processes, covering both the content of education and its methodology, as well as its control. At the height of the hysteria triggered off by the exploitation of the Bennett research and the Auld report on Tyndale, that responsible journal of the establishment, *The Times*, talked of the ‘wild men of the classroom’ who must be brought to heel, implicitly labelling all primary school teachers in this way. In the privileged and sombre recesses of that obsolete institution, the House of Lords, Noel Annan released a flood of vituperation against one of the Tyndale teachers, describing him as an evil man whose uncontrolled activities—if allowed wider scope—could lead to disaster. All this lay behind the Prime Minister’s Ruskin speech and sparked the so-called ‘Great Debate’. This ideological conflict raises fundamental questions as to the nature and purpose of schooling in capitalist society. The economic and fiscal crisis, then, is compounded by an ideological crisis.

**In the Political Arena**

If we place the present crisis in its recent historical setting it may help us to orientate ourselves. One aspect is certainly disenchantment on the part of the ruling forces in society with the efficacy of purely educational measures in softening deep-seated social and economic conflicts. This was highlighted in particular in the United States with the supposed failure of the Headstart and Follow Through programmes which (according to some) did not achieve the objectives of overcoming, through education, the social and economic disadvantages of the poorest sections of the community (predominantly blacks). This somewhat premature conclusion was compounded by large-scale educational surveys which purported to show

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1 NATFHE journal, November 24, 1976.

2 See *Teaching Styles and Pupil Progress* (1976).
that 'schools make no difference'—a convenient doctrine for those who wish to cut back on education, whether for economic or political reasons, and one which prepared the way for the economic attacks on education.

In this country the so-called boom period of the 1960s presaged by Wilson's 'white hot revolution', led to the expansion of higher education with government support, to the partial establishment of comprehensive secondary education with at least, for the first time, some official support so that it broke through to become, by now, the leading system in the maintained sector; and to the modification of the rigid inner school streaming and differentiating systems inherited from the past. It has been following this period of relative advance that, in the 70s, have succeeded the increasingly sharp economic and ideological attacks referred to at the start.

These latter advances, the impetus for which, it is worth recalling, never came from above (from the government), but from below, particularly in the insistent pressure of the labour movement determined to achieve comprehensive education, and from teachers and others who, through their own experience, increasingly abandoned streaming and differentiating systems within the schools, carried the perspective of further radical changes. It is fear of this advance, I suggest, which lies at the basis of the current crisis, and which gives it its overwhelmingly political form today. As the lid comes down, aspirations which were beginning to find realisation in the school system are suppressed—more or less forcibly. So the conflict is necessarily sharpened, raising as the fundamental question—that I mentioned at the start—to whom do schools belong?

If the attempt is now being made to establish central control from above, then for the labour movement and its allies is not the crucial question now how to enter effectively into the system and transform it? And this raises the question as to what scope there is in modern capitalist society to do just this? What is the relation between education and the state? These are important issues, basically political in character. It is here particularly that I want to look at how Marx dealt with such questions in his day. Because for Marx also, when he turned his attention to education, it was these questions that he regarded as of paramount importance.

Marx and the Struggle for the Shorter Working Day

The first point to clarify is precisely this: what was Marx's own attitude to the public provision of education, and what was his view as to the role of the state in making this provision? These are both issues on which, fortunately, we have a clear expression of Marx's views, and shortly I will turn to these.

But first it will help us to orientate ourselves to this topic if we look first, briefly, at Marx's attitude to a closely related question; that is, to the contemporary struggle for the shortening of the working day—its own precondition for the wider provision of education. As is well known and fully documented, Marx stood very firmly in favour, and fully supported, the long drawn struggle for the limitation of the hours of labour, first to 10 hours, and later for the eight-hour day (all this is fully documented in the chapters on the Factory Acts in Capital). In his well-known Instructions for the delegates to the Geneva Congress of the International Working Man's Association in 1867, Marx spelled this out as imperative, "a preliminary condition", as he wrote, "without which all further attempts at improvement and emancipation must prove abortive". The limitation of the working day, he insisted, "is needed to restore the health and physical energies of the working class, that is, the great body of the nation, as well" (and I stress this) "as well as to secure for them the possibility of intellectual development, sociable intercourse, social and political action".3

The achievement of this measure he saw as a practical possibility in the conditions of class struggle. By carrying through a mass movement with this as its objective, Marx understood that the organised working class had shown itself capable of grasping a specific issue and, in fighting for it, of bringing about a transformation of the situation which itself opened the way for further advance. How else do we interpret Marx's famous assessment that the winning of the Ten Hours Act in 1846 was "the victory of a principle"; that this was "the first time that in broad daylight the political economy of the middle class succumbed to the political economy of the working class".4

On the Provision of Mass Education

In just the same way, and on the same occasion, Marx argued strongly for the provision of mass, popular education—that provision (and I stress the word provision) to be made through the state. "The more enlightened part of the working class." he wrote in 1867, "fully understands that the future of its class, and, therefore, of mankind, altogether depends upon the formation of the rising working generation." "They know that,
before everything else, the children and juveniles must be saved from the crushing effects of the present system. This can only be effected by converting social reason into social force, and, under the given circumstances, there exists no other method of doing so, than through general laws, enforced by the power of the state. In enforcing such laws, the working class do not fortify government power. On the contrary, they transform that power, now used against them, into their own agency. They effect by a general act what they would vainly attempt by a multitude of isolated individual efforts. Here again, then, we have the concept of transformation through struggle.

There can be no doubt whatever that Marx (and for that matter, also Engels) placed great importance on the struggle of the working class for the means to education for their children. No one who has sunk himself at all in Marx's work, for instance, in Capital, can doubt this. But the question is, how did Marx envisage that such education could be provided, and, above all, what was his view as to the control of education?

Utilisation of the State
Marx realised, as we have seen, that the only means by which effective public provision could be made was by utilising the power of the state. He develops this approach very clearly in the section on education in the Critique of the Gotha Programme—a section, incidentally, which occurs centrally in that dealing with the state where he held that the programme was sadly deficient.

Marx thoroughly objected to the formulation in the programme which demanded the provision of "elementary education by the state". This, for Marx, was "completely objectionable". The programme of the Social Democratic Party should demand that the state provide the means to education—not the education itself. This is the essence of Marx's point, and it is completely Consistent with the viewpoint expressed earlier, to the delegates to the International.

The state is the appropriate body to define and even enforce certain regulations; for example, qualifications of the teaching staff, the subjects to be taught, and so on. It should also employ inspectors "to supervise the observance of these regulations" (as Marx put it); but this, said Marx, is something quite different from appointing the state as "educator of the people". Rather (he adds) "government and church should alike be excluded from all influence in the schools". Far from the state educating the children, it is inversely "the state that could do with a rude education by the people".

Here we have the essence of Marx's demand; and his standpoint in relation to the education of the people. The means for this education can only and must be provided by the state. It is in line with this thinking that, having achieved the means to elementary education, the working class is also right to fight for the extension of this provision into secondary and higher education. But it is certainly not enough to do this alone; to rest satisfied with the gradual extension of the means to education—as some on the left have done and do today. There is also the question of control, and so of the nature and general tendency of the system of education that is brought into being.

On the Control of Education
Marx held the view that it was entirely objectionable (from the standpoint of the working class) if the state in capitalist society arrogated to itself the right directly to control the education of the workers. This was his main point of criticism of the Gotha programme. To ensure that the means of education are provided by a general law, he wrote, "is something quite different from appointing the state as educator of the people". By framing the question in this way, Marx is directing attention precisely to the question of control.

Marx did not develop this theme so far as I am aware, and we must be wary of putting words into his mouth, but is it not evident that Marx envisaged some form of popular, perhaps local and democratic, control over education? His specific references in this context to the United States and Switzerland, where at this time education was not provided by the state, but through locally elected school boards and similar organisations, is a clear indication of this. What he was objecting to was the proposition in the Gotha programme that laid the way open to supporting state control in the highly centralised Prusso-German state (as he put it) which was the reality the German Social Democrats faced.

This is how Marx dealt with the question in his day. And if we analyse objectively the position in Britain today, it is evident that the state, as such, does not control education in this sense—or at least does not as yet do so. The system of education is directly administered by authorities elected locally, each with its own administrative staff, within the administrative and statutory structure determined by law (through Parliament). The teachers are employed by these authorities—they are not employed directly by the state nor by the central government. Neither state nor central...
government lays down by law what should be taught, nor how it should be taught.

Nevertheless—and this is the point I want to stress—powerful voices are now being raised (taking advantage of the current crisis) to demand just that centralisation of power over the process of education that Marx warned most strongly against. To some extent, it could be argued, the crisis is being deliberately fuelled with this as the desired outcome. Those who support this proposal, and they include leading officials in the Department of Education and Science itself, are clearly making a bid to bring education more directly under the immediate control of the state and its apparatus, representing the bourgeoisie (monopoly capitalism). We should recognise that this is the objective significance of such demands. And, if we are to be guided by examining how Marx dealt with the same issue in his day, then, like him, we should strongly and consistently oppose any such tendencies.

Need for Dialectical Thinking

It is, of course, the case that, since Marx wrote on the subject roughly 100 years ago, there has been a considerable expansion of the state's bureaucratic apparatus concerning education—as well as a constant and discernible move towards centralisation. But is it right to go as far as many do today, sometimes claiming to speak as Marxists, in the evaluation of the whole system of education as a function controlled by the state, and reducible to the simple reproduction of existing social relations? Or is it right, from a Marxist standpoint, to characterise the existing system and all previous systems as operating solely to legitimise the status quo?

Are the Althusserians right when they define education as the means by which the ideology of the ruling class is assimilated by the rising generation—as, as he and Poulantzas put it, an Ideological State Apparatus, and leaving it at that? Are these people right when they tell teachers and others that, whatever forms or procedures they adopt in school or classroom, they can do nothing to transform the situation? That they are, in fact, mere cogs in an other-directed machine?

In my view, interpretations of this kind, popular among academic sociologists, but having a certain influence and presented under the banner of Marxism, have little in common with Marx's own views on these questions. There is nothing in Marx's writings, so far as I am aware, which indicates that he would 'place' education as part of the oppressive apparatus of the state, not open to any influences which could bring about its transformation—given that the external conditions are ripe. In any case this kind of thinking and interpretation seems alien to Marx's whole approach, particularly in that it ignores the dialectical, and, one might add, the historical nature of his thinking and analysis.

Transform the System

We could consider this both from the angle of the structure of educational systems, and from that of their content and ethos. As far as structure is concerned, Marx's social and political analysis would lead us to suppose that educational systems reflect class differences—to put it briefly (and certainly my own work in the history of education indicates that this is the case). But what is there fixed and final about that?

Marx also showed that the relations between different social classes change as a result of human action conditioned by economic and technological development. Indeed Marx's whole thinking and analysis of capitalist society led him to the conclusion that revolutionary change is not only possible but, given the conditions (both economic and political), inevitable.

The hegemony of one class (or alliance of classes) gives way to that of another; and in the course of such revolutionary change the previously oppressed class becomes dominant, ushering in a new economic-social formation—that is, socialism.

If that is your perspective as a Marxist, how can you hold and propagate the view that the working class and its allies have not the power, the ability and the potential force to transform social institutions? To represent the working class or labour movement as cribbed, cabined and confined for all time within the rigid bonds of class structuring and dominant ISAs is not only to disarm the working class in this struggle, it is to distort Marx's main and most important teaching about the nature of society and the means and possibilities of change.

Far from seeing the working class as the passive subjects (as it were) of a system of education provided and controlled by the state (representing the bourgeoisie)—the picture presented by some analysts—Marx clearly entertained (and promulgated) the perspective of control over the system by the working class and its allies. He clearly held the view that the working class and its allies must make use of the means to education provided by the state—must enter and transform the system so that it directly meets their own needs. That is the clear implication of his insistence, that neither government nor church should control the system of education itself. And this is surely the lesson for us today. And in parenthesis one might add that the last thing the working class and its allies must do is to follow the advice of Ivan Illich and others and set out to destroy the school system as
the first step in introducing the convivial Utopia they claim would follow. From the Marxist angle this is very clearly the wrong target.

Nature and Content of Education

Much the same analysis is relevant to the problem of the nature or content of education—its general ethos and direction. This is a difficult question to deal with briefly and I must confine myself to some leading points. In his Instructions to the Delegates at the Geneva Congress Marx set out briefly his ideas on this topic. "By education," he said, "we understand three things", first "mental education", second "bodily" or what we would now call physical education, and thirdly technological training which, he said, "imparts the general principles of all processes of production, and simultaneously initiates the child and young persons in the practical use and handling of the elementary instruments of all trades". "The combination," he adds, "of paid productive labour, mental education, bodily exercise and polytechnic training will raise the working class far above the level of the higher and middle classes."7

These ideas, put briefly here—almost in a kind of shorthand—cannot be dismissed as anachronistic, even if circumstances have changed considerably since they were formulated. They arise logically from Marx's whole analysis and interpretation of human social evolution. Marx saw human development as the product of labour on the one hand, and of knowledge on the other.

It is through social productive labour that man develops his specifically human qualities—speech and the capacity for thought and planning, the many-sided skills and abilities that developed in close relation with man's increasing penetration both into nature and society—that is, knowledge. Hence the emphasis on productive labour and polytechnical education as essential aspects of education. "There can be no doubt," wrote Marx in Capital, "that when the working class comes to power, as inevitably it must, technical instruction, both theoretical and practical, will take its proper place in the working-class schools."8 It is also worth noting the stress on physical education, which Marx shared with Robert Owen, whose educational practice he holds up as a model in Capital.

Struggle to Change the Content

But what of the content of what Marx defined as "mental education"? We cannot know precisely what Marx meant by this, since he does not elaborate on it, but presumably he had in mind what we would now call cognitive development—the development of the capacity for systematic, generalised thought, of man's highest mental characteristics. Marx says nothing about the content of this education (apart from the insistence on polytechnical education) which must, in any case, be determined in the light of contemporary knowledge in the natural sciences, the social sciences and the humanities, as well as in the field of technology. And this raises the question of ideological (in the sense of distorting) components of that knowledge.

It is perfectly true that Marx held that the dominant ideas in any epoch are the ideas of the dominant class; if this is accepted it follows that such ideas inevitably penetrate education. But does this mean that, equally inevitably, the ideas of the dominant class must always dominate in the field of education? Clearly this depends on under whose control the educational process is carried on—hence, surely, the extreme importance (and primary significance) of Marx's position on this latter question already discussed.

But we should also remember that Marx warned specifically (as did Engels later) against too mechanical (or 'technicist') a view of the relations between superstructure and base. He recognised (as after all he was in a good position to) that the class struggle is reflected in ideological struggle; that new classes develop their own ideological outlook and fight to achieve hegemony (to use a fashionable phrase), just as the French Encyclopaedists did before the French revolution and the Marxists did in Russia before 1917. Indeed, we saw a good example of this at the start of this lecture in the struggle over the content of education at Ruskin College leading to the Ruskin strike and formation of the Plebs League.

So again the conclusion is that there is nothing fixed and determined in this field either—that the dominant ideology (or ISA), representing the interests of the dominant class in capitalist society, can be challenged, and challenged successfully, given the conditions—the general political and social context. And that it is precisely to transform the nature of the education given in the public system—its content and ethos—that must be a primary objective of the labour movement.

This involves a critical analysis of the ideological components of knowledge—particularly in the social sciences—which form the subject matter of school education and so the material in terms of which mental development takes place, and an insistence that this subject matter should be cleansed, so far as possible, from ideological components in order to present to pupils and students a correct reflection of reality rather than a distorted view whose object is to buttress existing

7 Ibid., 89.
class interests and relations. The aim must be to define a content of education which both provides access to knowledge (involving a grasp of symbolic systems necessary for all—especially language and mathematics), and which systematically encourages mental development through promoting an understanding of both nature and society as they really

Marx's Self-Education

Since this is the Marx Memorial Lecture, it is worth developing this theme with a reference to Marx's own self-education—not necessarily as a model of what he would wish for others, but as indicating what he held to be of value. In his well-known speech to the Youth Leagues on education, where he stressed the need for the working class "to take for ourselves the sum total of human knowledge", Lenin stressed the fact that Marx himself developed "Communist theory, the science of Communism" because he "took his stand on the firm foundations of human knowledge which had been gained under capitalism". Lenin refers to the fact that Marx's elucidation of the laws of development of human society was based on "the most exact, most detailed, most profound study of capitalist society with the aid of preceding knowledge, which he had thoroughly assimilated. He critically studied all that had been created by human society, and did not ignore a single point of it." This, of course, is certainly the case. The three main sources of Marx's outlook (and method) were identified by Lenin as (i) German philosophy, (ii) English political economy and (iii) French socialism. But quite apart from his immensely wide reading and study in these and related fields, Marx had a fascinated interest and love for world literature and had himself been brought up a classical scholar. "Just as his own scientific work mirrored a whole epoch," writes his biographer, Franz Mehring, "so his literary favourites were those whose creations also mirrored their epoch; from Aeschylus and Homer to Dante, Shakespeare, Cervantes and Goethe." According to his son-in-law, Lafargue, Marx read Aeschylus in the original Greek at least once a year. "He was always a faithful lover of the ancient Greeks," wrote Mehring, adding that he would have scourged those contemptible souls from the temple who would have prevented the workers from appreciating the culture of the classic world.

Lafargue wrote of Marx that he could read all the leading European languages and write in three (German, French, English), seeing a foreign language as "a weapon in the struggle for life"; at 50 Marx learned Russian in order to read Pushkin, Gogol, Shchedrin. Late in life he made a detailed study of Shakespeare's use of language. Marx was able to recite whole scenes from Shakespeare from memory, as well as long passages from the Divine Comedy, "of which", according to Liebknecht, "he knew almost the whole by heart".

These points are made since they are relevant here; they help to establish, or give body to, Marx's outlook on science, culture and knowledge generally—the extent to which he himself "appropriated" human knowledge, how he prepared himself to obtain access to "the sum total of human knowledge", as Lenin put it. To some extent they indicate his attitude to education and its function—to what he meant by the simple phrase "mental development".

If Marx would have "scourged from the temple" anyone seeking to deprive the working class from access to the culture of classical antiquity, this can be taken, in the modern context, to imply that Marx would have taken the same attitude to proposals (widespread among some wearing 'radical' garments today) that the working class, or their children, should be denied access to the most valuable, important and precious aspects of science and culture, to be fobbed off with entertainments and anodynes or firmly kept within their own immediate environment, cultural or material—a standpoint rationalised by a crude relativist view as to the nature of culture and knowledge.

I believe that the way Marx dealt with this question also in his day is highly relevant to this key issue today—how and in what direction should the nature of education be transformed so that it begins genuinely to meet the interests and needs of the working class and to provide full scope for mental development.

Education and Human Change

I have dealt so far with Marx's attitude to the provision of education for the working class, and with its content, bringing out Marx's view as to the role of the state in the provision of the means to education, of the importance of democratic control, as well as discussing Marx's own views as to the nature of education.

But what, now, of the power of education to bring about human change, and what of the nature of the educational process itself? What was Marx's attitude to these crucial theoretical questions, now regarded as highly controversial? It

9 Selected Works, Vol. 9, 470.

10 These quotations are taken from Literature and Art, by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, a volume of selections, published by International Publishers (New York), 1947.
must already be clear that Marx placed immense importance on education in terms of human development—I have already quoted his statement that the future of the working class, "and therefore of mankind, altogether depends upon the formation of the rising working generation," and his statement that, if the kind of education he outlined could be won—that is, an all-round education linked closely to life (one in sharp contrast to the narrow academic abstracted type of education typical of bourgeois conceptions and practice at that time)—that such an education would "raise the working class far above the level of the higher and middle classes". These are already clear statements of Marx's belief in the power of education to effect human change.

In taking this standpoint, Marx was in the classic tradition of English materialist philosophy. It was John Locke who held that nine parts in ten of what any man becomes is due to his education, basing himself, of course, on a materialist interpretation, as set out in his Essay on Human Understanding, as to how man's knowledge, attitudes and, indeed, character are formed through the impact of the external world on the senses. Here lies the basis of the Marxist theory of reflection, elaborated, following the work of Locke, and particularly Hobbes, through the crucial formulation of associationist theory by David Hartley, to the outlook of a Joseph Priestley and particularly of the French Encyclopaedists, or philosophes, such as Helvetius.

It was this outlook and its implications, in terms of building the educative society, that is so effectively, and sympathetically, summarised by Marx in The Holy Family: "If man draws all his knowledge, sensation, etc., from the world of the senses, the empirical world must be arranged so that in it man experiences and gets used to what is really human and that he becomes aware of himself as man. . . . If man is shaped by his surroundings, his surroundings must be made human. If man is social by nature, he will develop his true nature only in society." The early Utopian socialists, both French and English, derived their outlook from this standpoint while Robert Owen, of course, attempted to create just such an educative and formative, society in his co-operative communities.

Educating the Educator

But Marx went further than this, and this is where his importance lies in any consideration of education as a process. It was precisely the mechanistic character of classical materialism that Marx saw as defective—the fact that, according to this interpretation, man was seen as the passive product of external circumstances, the recipient of external stimuli which formed his knowledge and character. This indeed was the view of Robert Owen, expressed in his famous slogan "Circumstances Make Man", as of the utilitarians (or philosophic radicals), Jeremy Bentham and James Mill, the former of whom held that children could be moulded "like wet clay in the plastic hand". The defect of this materialism, said Marx, lay in its inability to subsume the active side of human development, and its consequent failure to provide any consistent explanation of human and social change. In his Theses on Feuerbach, Marx notes—and here he points to his own solution—that: "The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of other circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men that change circumstances and that the educator must himself be educated." 12

Relation of Consciousness and Language

As is well known, Marx expressed his synthesis, or seized the contradiction, thus: "The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity," he wrote, "can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionising practice." 13 Man, through his own activity, in the process of his activity, both changes his external circumstances and changes himself. Man's consciousness and his activity are one—a unity. And activity implies both a changing consciousness and a changed external world.

Here we have the kernel of the Marxist outlook—one which links together both dialectics and materialism in the explanation of human social evolution, and of human development as such.

I will come back to a consideration of the implications of Marx's thinking as expressed here for child development—the development of abilities and skills in the process of education—very shortly, since it must surely be clear that here we have a key of profound importance for teachers and educators primarily concerned with just these aspects of human development. But first I must refer, if briefly, to a closely related matter, that is, to Marx's view as to the close relationship between consciousness and language, which also has profound significance for education.

Language, he wrote in The German Ideology, "is as old as consciousness, language is practical consciousness, for language, like consciousness, only arises from the need, the necessity, of inter-

13 Ibid., 75-76.
course with other men." And here it is appropriate to pay tribute to the brilliant group of psychologists in the Soviet Union, pupils of Lev Vigotski, who have consciously developed Marx's approach and related it so fruitfully both to psychology and to education.

I refer in particular to the work of Professor Luria, Professor Leontiev and others who have clearly brought out in their theoretical, scientific and experimental work, both the central role played by language in mental development, and the importance of the child's activity in the formation of abilities. This is to elaborate a specifically Marxist standpoint on education. It leads logically to emphasising the role of the teacher as educator, responsible for structuring the child's activity, and so his learning and development.

Hence the positive approach, in the work of Luria and others, to the development of children's abilities, mathematical, scientific, musical, artistic, provided always that the proper conditions can be created. From all this arises the firm standpoint of Marxists as to the power of education in effecting human change and development. In the first place this is based on a recognition that human development cannot be explained simply in terms of biological laws.

Mankind differs from the rest of the animal world specifically through the development of speech with its power of abstraction and generalisation. Through the use of language man's entire social and cultural inheritance can be passed on from generation to generation in quite a different way from the laws governing heritability in the animal world. This is clearly a matter of key importance. But in the second place, acceptance of the power of education is firmly grounded scientifically and experimentally, since Marx's day, in the empirical work of psychologists and educators both in the Soviet Union and elsewhere.

In particular this approach forms the rational basis for the rejection of all fatalistic theories as to the limits of development characteristic, for instance, of the pseudo-science of intelligence testing for psychometry), with its recent expressions of racist and class prejudice, although this also depends, of course, on a critical analysis of the unexpressed assumptions embodied in the technologies supporting these anti-human theories—and, one might add, in view of recent revelations, in a hard, cold look at the actual data adduced in their support.

Activity and Consciousness

With this as a basis we may touch briefly on some matters relevant to current ideological controversies in education. If it is through his activity that the child's consciousness is formed—the material substructure of which lies in what Luria calls "complex functional systems" built up in the child's brain and higher nervous system—then it is the educator's responsibility both to provide for that activity and to guide it so that learning and development can most effectively take place.

The child's activity may be both physical and mental; indeed the two often stand in a close dialectical relationship with each other, as research has shown; in forming concepts of number, for instance, the actual physical movements of the hand and arm may play a decisive part at a specific stage. Again, such activity may be based not only on the manipulation of objects but also utilise visual and verbal presentations—again at different times. All this is a matter for research. But one thing is clear; learning on the part of the child can and must logically be separated from teaching—even if the role of the teacher, as already argued, is highly important. The teacher who adopts the approach that he alone, as the teacher, must be active—the children passive, recipients of stimuli emanating from the teacher, is falling into the old error of the mechanical materialists of the past (an error on which much of existing practice in the schools is certainly still based).

Such an approach is more likely, if one can generalise, to turn off the pupil or student than to involve him directly in the learning process. Rather the teacher's role is to structure the child's activity as to maximise learning on the part of the child. With large classes, and lacking the necessary resources, that is difficult; hence the need to provide the teacher with the conditions necessary and with the tools of the trade. But certainly this is the approach most directly in line with the Marxist approach to teaching and learning.

It is not enough, therefore, for those who speak in the name of Marx and Marxism, to dismiss with contempt those who are seeking the way to activate the child's learning as 'trendies', nor to hold up to ridicule those who are attempting, without sufficient theoretical or practical assistance, to break away from the rigid and arid approaches of the past. Nor is it enough, to go to the other end of the spectrum, to deny altogether the need for structure or even 'interference' by the teacher in the supposed 'spontaneous' development of the child.

The first of these standpoints expresses no more than a philistine ignorance both of Marxism and of modern developments in the field of education.

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14 The German Ideology (1942 ed.). 19.
15 See Charles Woolfson's article on "Culture, Language and the Human Personality" in the August Marxism Today.
and psychology. The second, in sacrificing all such knowledge on the altar of the child’s spontaneity, leads to a kind of mushy liberalism which only adds to the confusion. Neither approach has anything to do with Marxism, as must be evident.

Teaching Styles

All this is directly relevant to the present controversy over teaching styles, or ways of teaching, referred to at the start of this lecture in the way the mass media exploited the Bennett research. This was seized on by Black Paper and conservative educationists to demand a return to rigid authoritarian methods which have already shown their educational ineffectiveness and are, in effect, being proposed as a means of social control—through fear of a break out.

If we are concerned with the transformation of the school, as I think we are, and as Marx conceived the problem—a transformation which bends the school system in such a way that it can act as a release of the potential energies and abilities of children in general—then I suggest we need to take up and develop in a rigorous way the clear pointers that Marx outlined in this field. The richness of Marx’s ideas on this issue, their applicability to education, stand in sharp contrast to the direction of much psychological and sociological theorising today in the field of education. It is this heritage, I suggest, that has been neglected in this country, even by Marxists, and that urgently needs development.

The Fear of Education

I started this lecture by delineating the current crisis in education and analysing, briefly, its form. While it is consistently suggested (officially) that the economic difficulties facing education are the direct result of Britain’s more general economic problems—in that the cut-back in educational expenditure will somehow act to improve Britain’s balance of payments, free resources for profitable investment, and so on, I want to repeat my earlier suggestion that a deeper (and more accurate) interpretation lies in a fear of education, of its power and implications, so clearly brought out in Marx’s thinking and his proposals as to the importance for the working class of educational advance. There are many indications that such a fear motivates the attacks on comprehensive education, on the move to non-streaming which opens up the school system as a whole in a new way, on the extent of teachers’ freedom (in this country) to determine the content and methods of education within the primary, as also in the secondary school; many other examples could be given.

These and other movements or trends within the school system represent a genuine, if perhaps a long-term, threat in their potential development, so that what we are experiencing, I suggest, are the opening shots in what may prove to be a sharp, and possibly decisive, struggle not only to cut back the system, but to bring it more stringently, more minutely, under control from the centre—that is, by the state. The hysteria (that is not too strong a word) developed recently, leading to the Prime Minister’s speech and the so-called ‘Great Debate’ (though many feel that precise measures have already been decided on), can be seen as deliberately prepared and fanned (partly by the mass media) in order to prepare the atmosphere which could allow a takeover bid to succeed.

Taking up the Challenge

If this is a correct interpretation, then clearly the labour movement needs to grasp its implications and take up the challenge. In these circumstances the stance of the labour movement is surely clear—and in accordance with its traditions.

First, then, we should accord to the power of education that attributed to it by Marx himself, and insist on its extension in the interests of the working class and its allies.

Second, there is the question of the transformation of the system, both as regards structure and content. I have argued that this is not only a possibility but even a necessity. The labour movement should certainly reject all fatalistic ideas, derived from whatever source, as to the impossibility of such action. There can be no question that today the labour movement has such power, and this can and must be exerted in the field of education as well as elsewhere. In co-operation with the teachers, who are part of the labour movement, the need is to bring about a transformation both of the content of the educational process (what is taught) and of the methodology (how this is taught) on lines already outlined, derived directly from Marx’s thinking and analysis.

Finally, and this follows from the last point, there is the question of the control of education of which Marx spoke so clearly. This points to the need to strengthen democratic systems of control without which, in any case, there can be no transformation of the schools. Local systems of education are still nominally under the control of local authorities, as I mentioned earlier. But recent events have induced a crisis in these systems, while at the same time centralising and bureaucratising tendencies are given free rein.

It is essential to counter this policy, the objectives of which are all too clear, and indeed to launch a counter-offensive against current tendencies. This means that every means must be found to strengthen local democratic control of
the schools and school systems, and to provide scope for teachers, parents and school students to participate effectively in the government and control of the schools. It is impossible now to spell out what steps need to be taken to ensure this is done, nor would it be appropriate in a lecture of this kind. What can be done is to point to the necessity for such action, and to the importance of pursuing an active policy in this direction.

The Relevance of Marx

So I conclude that a study of Marx’s writings, and his actions, in one specific field can, nearly 100 years later, still provide us with an all-round understanding and with a guide to action relevant to our problems today. In other areas, to which Marx devoted much more attention, the same is certainly true. We are surely right, then, to pay tribute to his genius in the clear and penetrating analysis he was able to make in areas of fundamental significance for man’s present life, and for his future. Because in a very real sense, Marx’s central concern throughout his life was with human development, seen as a whole—with the evolution of human societies in the past, the present and the future. Above all, he wished to find the form of social organisation which would enable men to develop what he called their ‘slumbering powers’; to shake off all one-sidedness and distortion, to develop their full humanity as all-round men; to create new forms of social living allowing the emergence of new characteristics: to enable men to enter into direct relations one with another in place of the alienation and exploitation which now separates man from man. Such was his life’s effort.

In one sense his central concern was, therefore, with the formation—the education—of mankind. If that is the overall significance of the totality of his life’s work, then I suggest we need to pay very special attention to his concept of an all-round education for all closely linked to life, and to endeavour to begin to realise it through the transformation of the school, linking this integrally with the struggle in other areas, economic, industrial and political, for the transformation of society as a whole.

"Does not the true character of each epoch," Marx once wrote, "come alive in the nature of its children?" And was not Marx’s primary concern to transform capitalist society in such a way as to provide for the fullest development of human potential—children as well as adults? But for Marx, as we know, analysis was not enough; action was also necessary. Previous philosophers, if I may conclude with a well-known quotation, "have only interpreted the world in different ways; the point is to change it”.