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Alienation in Education: A Marxian Re-Definition

The alienation of man in modern technological society emerged as a concern central to many social issues of the 1960s. In that decade, the term “alienation” was appropriated as a watchword by an assortment of disaffected people who used it as a political, sociological, or psychological concept to indicate their perceived separation from the mainstream of society. Not the least of its usage has been in the field of educational rhetoric where, very simply, it has been repeatedly held that the large Kafkaesque institutions that fulfill the function of formal education in our society are in one way or another responsible for, or at least characteristic of, much of the alienation in this society.

This study is an attempt to arrive at the meaning of “alienation” as it is used in that context. In the process, it will examine not just alienation, but the family of concepts and explanations that surround the use of that term. Its main object will be to dispel some of the “woolly” notions that have underpinned the agonizing, criticizing, and recommendations for change that have been directed at existing practice in the schools. In the process, it will illustrate how, for tasks such as this one, certain modes of explanation are more suitable than others. If this study refers to “schooling” and not “education,” it is simply because no agreement at all exists amongst educational theorists as to the meaning of the term “education,” while there is unanimity on the question of “schooling” — it is the process that takes place in the schools.

The motive for producing this study (besides a strong personal revulsion for "culture people" and their jargon) is the suspicion that the use of the term "alienation" to refer to some of the apparently undesirable aspects of modern schooling has more often than not been marked by confusion and mystification. It sees in such constructions as "Schools are alienating" or "Schools promote alienation," a vague, ambiguous use of the term as a negative "catch-all," or worse yet, as a part of the repertoire of quasi-psychological jargonisms which the "new psychology" people have built up in order to categorize their world conveniently.

the alienation explanation

The use of the alienation explanation to apply to schooling originated in dissatisfaction with some aspects of modern schooling as it was perceived by critics. The dissatisfaction might have concerned, for instance, the pronounced apathy, the lassitude, or the quiet resentment exhibited by either students or teachers, or any number of similarly unsettling types of behavior found in the school. In response to the need to explain such behavior, to apply a term that denoted something more definite or certain than just a vague uneasiness on the part of the observer, the situation was characterized as "alienated," or "alienating;" the people were then said to be suffering from "alienation." Furthermore, the application of the term almost always implied a desire for change and, of course, the analysis of the problem, or the meaning of the concept "alienation" adopted by the critic was the basis of the change he recommended.

The classic text on alienation, the one that has provided the precedent to many of the current uses of the concept, was provided by the young Karl Marx in his essay, "Alienated Labor." In this essay, Marx addressed himself to the general problem of labor, pointing out ways in which people in capitalist society are alienated because of the social conditions through which they must produce their lives.

On the one hand, it is possible to understand people as alienated from the PRODUCT of their labors. From this point-of-view, the laborer is separated from the product of his labor, when instead of affirming his humanity, the object produced stands opposed to, becomes alien to, or independent of the producer. It is a case of the laborer turning against himself, for the product of labor is only, after all, "labor which has

been embodied in an object and turned into a physical thing . . . an objectification of labour.” And, it follows from the above form of alienation that the laborer is also alienated from the ACTIVITY of his labor itself. Marx explains:

The product is, indeed, only a resumé of the activity of production. Consequently, if the product of labour is alienation, labour itself must be active alienation . . . The alienation of the object of labour only summarizes the alienation of the work activity itself.²

According to Marx, it is possible, also, to understand man as a SPECIES-BEING, in which case, it can be seen how under capitalism, man as laborer is forced into forms of life-activity that negate his essence as species-being.

Since alienated labour (1) alienates nature from man; and (2) alienates man from himself, from his own active function, his life-activity, so it alienates him from the species. It makes species life into a means for individual life. In the first place, it alienates species-life and individual life, it turns the latter, as an abstraction, into the purpose of the former, also in its abstract and alienated form.³

The laborer’s alienation is made complete when the dominant relations under which he lives produce his separation from his fellow man. Under capitalism, the devastation of social life is complete as the conditions under which people produce demand individuality and penalize any manifestations of sociality.

A direct consequence of the alienation of man from the product of his labour, from his life-activity, from his species-life, is that man is alienated from other men. When man confronts himself, he also confronts other men. What is true of man’s relation to his work, to the product of work, and to himself, is also true of his relationship to other men, to their labour, and to the objects of their labour.⁴

In many of the “alienation explanations” used in regard to the unsettling perceptions concerning the schools, it is possible to see elements of the above Marxian understandings. Very briefly, that is, the students’ state of consciousness is seen in terms of the forms of activity into which they are forced by the school. Their resentment, rebelliousness, apathy, *ill health*, have been popularly characterized in the following ways, all of which have been at one time or another related to the Marxian alienation theme:

estrangement — Schools separate the “real people” who come to school from their lives as they are forced to lead them while in school. That is, the student is estranged not only from other people, but from himself. Erich Fromm explains this state of existence. The individual student, he holds,

does not experience himself as the subject of his own acts, as a thinking, feeling, loving person, but he experiences himself only in the things he has created, as the objects of the externalized manifestations of his powers. He is in touch with himself only by surrendering himself to the objects of his creation.⁵

dehumanization — This variation reveals that one of the bases of the alienation explanation is that it depends on a preconception of the full-blown human being, relative to which the people being perceived are less than human. Paul Tillich's lament is most common:

Western technical society had produced methods of adjusting persons to its demands in production and consumption which are less brutal, but in the long run more effective than totalitarian repression. They depersonalize not by commanding, but by providing — providing, namely, what makes human creativity superfluous.⁶

emasculatation — This variant expresses the critics' concern that the people under observation have had their humanity "torn out" or rendered sterile by long periods of repression by inhuman conditions. Jules Henry articulated this particular suspicion about the effect that the schools have on children.

The function of education has never been to free the mind and spirit of man, but to bind them; and to the end that the mind and spirit of his children shall never escape, *Homo Sapiens* has employed praise, ridicule, admonition, accusation, mutilation, and even torture to chain them to the culture pattern.⁷

impoverishment — Another explanation holds that the adverse effect of the schools is the manner in which they starve children, emotionally, spiritually, psychically, etc. John Holt provides an example of the manner in which school critics have employed this simple physical analogy to convey their message.

Nobody starts off stupid... What happens is that the [natural capacity for learning and intellectual growth] is destroyed, and more than by any other one thing, by the process that we misname education...⁸

outward dependency — This popular variant contains a concern central to liberal theory; that the healthy, full-functioning human being is one who is free in the sense of being self-sufficient. Schools, according to Abraham Maslow, are responsible for a profound illness when they produce children who are "outer directed" or "deficit-motivated" in bondage to others. He explains:

The deficit-motivated man is far more dependent on other people than is the man who is predominantly growth-motivated. He is more

“interested,” more needful, more attached, more desirous.⁹

regimentation — A similar variation exists in the minds of critics who fear that modern North American society is becoming more and more the Orwellian nightmare, demanding of all its members passive, robot-like participation. Paul Goodman is the leading proponent of this point-of-view, and in his accounts refers very often to the role of the schools which “less and less represent any human values but simply adjustment to a mechanical system.”¹⁰

an examination of the explanations

What should be noticeable in the above sampling of currently-popular alienation explanations is that “alienation,” besides being a very Americanized concept, at this point in history lies quite clearly within the discipline of social psychology, its choice of problems, its method, its terminology. The critical examination that will be directed at the alienation explanation will then be to some extent an examination of the social-psychological method of explaining social problems.

Firstly, it is rare to find an alienation explanation that is not based on a broad philosophical position which separates the existence with which the critic is confronted from some notion of essence and, moreover, holds that the person’s existence does not fully express that person’s essence. Very simply put, the people being characterized as “alienated” are not what they might or should be; it is not “human,” according to the critic, to be estranged, dehumanized, etc. In this case, “human” can be taken to mean what people are *basically* or *essentially*, as apart from their day-to-day existence.

The most philosophically-fundamental criticism of any such account is to question the underlying assumption of the Idealist, or (as I prefer to call it) the Subjectivist position which posits essence prior to existence, the Ideal as higher than the Real, or Ideology before the world. The debate over whether essence precedes existence, has raged for centuries in the history of philosophy, and each side has produced notable champions. For the purpose of this study, it suffices to point out that a subjectivist explanation for the school’s problems can be simply dismissed as a creation of the critic’s perception as ordered by a peculiar ideological framework. That is, it can be argued that the putative objective cause of the problem is not at all in the schools, but in the critic’s mind and its conception of True Humanity. Or, such a subjectivist explana-

tion can even be dismissed on another level by a person who subscribes to the general subjectivist position that essence precedes existence. Such a person might dismiss another's explanation of the schooling problem by holding that it was based upon an incorrect idea about man's essence, True Humanity, and similar concepts.

Following from the above, any criticism based on subjective dissatisfaction is too easily rendered useless as a basis upon which to recommend change; it has only to be confronted with another subjective account — another feeling. To say that one does not perceive reality *that way*, or that there is nothing regrettable about the phenomena being described, or finally, that what is perceived is merely any aberration or accidental quality of that particular group of students is to answer effectively the criticism and counter the argument that there is a need for change. And, the person with the original "feeling" then has no choice but to search out somebody who shares his feeling. Or, he could take a tranquilizer.

Another shortcoming in the alienation explanations illustrated above is the manner in which they serve to identify the problem (the unsettling perception) as a quality of the people being discussed. The effect of an explanation that sees the problem as essentially one of attitude, orientation, disposition, or inability to cope, rather than as a characteristic of the situation, institution, or society, is that it tends to promote the understanding that the people the critic claims to be concerned about are, in some abstract way, the problem, or even the *source* of their own problems.

The alienation explanation as it applies to schools sees the problem as a feature of the students (or teachers), allowing for some vague understanding that it has something to do with their surroundings. The reasons for the victims' misfortunes are within the victims themselves. This is the effect of explaining their troublesome behavior by recourse to their state of consciousness. Such explanations, of course, rely on a tautology and hence do not serve to *explain* at all. Analogously, it does not help to *explain* "War" by referring to the xenophobia, hatred and mistrust prevalent during wartime. To talk in these terms may add to a description of War, but adds nothing by way of explanation of its existence in the first place.

The social-psychological explanation is problematic in that it presupposes the very things the existence of which it is supposedly explaining. The mentality or spirit of the students,

which the critic chooses to perceive as essentially a social-psychological phenomenon, is explained by paraphrasing it in another bit of social-psychological jargon. We are told, in other words, that the students suffer from lassitude, passivity, lack of ambition because they are alienated, i.e., because they suffer estrangement, dehumanization either as an individual or a social-psychological state.

The value of any socio-psychological explanation can be questioned in this manner. What does it teach us? When alienation is perceived in terms of feelings, attitudes, or *states of consciousness* what the theorist is attempting to do is explain a social situation in terms that apply to individual members of that grouping. That is, the explanation runs afoul of exactly the same obstacles to explaining society shared by any disciplines that start with the individual as their primary data. Once they have explained society in terms of its individual members, and once they have fully described these members in their individuality, then it is impossible to describe society except by superimposing a completely new set of categories or "truths" on the description of the individual. Or, how does one understand a *social psychological* state of consciousness, mentality, etc., except as a generalized individual state?"¹ Positing attitudes, feelings, temperaments, and other such states as attributes of a grouping are at best highly suspicious constructions and bring us not much closer to understanding.

the factor approach to alienation

It does not require intellectual sophistication to see that even if we concede that it is possible to understand an undesirable state of consciousness in the terms of a social-psychological model, that the questions still remain, "Why that psychological state?" and "How are we to understand it?" To revert to another set of psychological jargonisms would certainly not help at this point. And, if we cannot answer such a question, we have no basis upon which to make intelligent recommendations for change.

In educational theory, one of the most common strategies employed to explain the existence of social-psychological phenomena such as alienation, is simply to refer to other forces or things in the school situation. In the form of the natural scientists and their paradigms, a causal relationship is seen between the aspects or "factors" in the total school

reality and this enables the production of statements such as "Alienation is caused by the authority-structure of the school (implicit in such relationships as teacher-student, principal-teacher, etc.)." Or, it is argued that the authoritarian examination causes a pre-set curriculum which presupposes an authority-centered classroom, and that is what causes the "alienated" student, the one who "sees the meaning of his labor outside of himself." But, there can be no doubt that the relationship is at least reciprocal, that the resentful, passive student justifies the authoritarian teacher and the strictly supervised school. Just ask any teacher.

Educational theorists have grown mad (or at least highly-published) by first isolating a whole range of aspects or "factors" of schooling, and then trying to relate them in a "chicken-or-egg" speculative game that could, if we were to take into account all aspects of the school, stun a computer. However, as far back as 1897, George Plekhanov recognized the basic fault in a "factor" analysis.

The "factors" are subject to reciprocal action. Each influences the rest, and is in turn influenced by the rest. The result is such an intricate web of reciprocal influences of direct actions and reflected reactions that whoever sets out to elucidate the course of social developments begins to feel his head swim and experiences an unconquerable necessity to find at least some sort of clue out of the labyrinth. Since bitter experience has taught him that the view of reciprocal action leads only to dizziness, he begins to seek for another view; he tries to simplify his task.¹²

Writers have made themselves well-published and prestigious by successfully isolating a "clue" — a factor that is basic to the rest and in terms of which the rest may be explained. Grades and failing are *basic* to the bad effects schooling has on children, says John Holt¹³; the "slave" relationship of students to schoolmasters is what Jerry Farber has isolated¹⁴; McLuhan pontificates on the central effect of the imposition of the media¹⁵; and Ivan Illich outdoes them all by outlining carefully the manner in which schooling is the "key" to everything else in our society.¹⁶

Basic to the futility (if not the absurdity) of the above explanations is the notion that factors or aspects can be taken out of their context and understood as self-contained, abstract entities. And, the analyst is sustained in this practice in the following manner: after having isolated a number of abstractions, he puts them back together and discovers that they fit *like a jig-saw*—the surprise and satisfaction attending this discovery is enough to assure everyone that the theorist is

“really on to something.” Even more satisfying is the practice of abstracting only one factor or aspect of the whole and then demonstrating how the whole which is inoperative and incomplete without that aspect is suddenly made complete with its re-insertion. Conclusion: The whole can be explained in terms of that part. John Holt, Ivan Illich, Paul Goodman, and the rest are “on to something”; a sinecure in the educational academy.

The key to the endless games that are devised according to the above rules are all premised upon a common positivist assumption—that reality (the world) is a monstrous composite of building blocks of reality, the primary data, that man can come to know “as they are.” It is possible to study these bits of data individually, or it is possible to study their relationship to each other.¹⁷ We come to know the “whole” only through a painful process of building onto a “textbook,” when that is completed, then we will only have to master it in order to “know” reality.¹⁸ It is this epistemological stance that allows us even to consider taking a “problem child” out of the classroom and into the counsellor’s office in order to study “his problem”—as if it were a problem without the classroom. It is also this stance that makes it possible for theorists to spend long hours discussing “alienated students,” i.e. trying to explain the alienation in terms of the “state” the student is in, as if that state were at all complete in itself.

explanation and the materialist dialectic

Some people come to dialectical materialism as a part of an adventurist happening; others come to embrace it because it provides the only satisfying philosophical structure within which the world can be explained. Volumes have been written in an attempt to explore this school of thought, but for the purposes of this essay, two of its central laws will have to suffice as a beginning.

- (1) The *meaning* of a social phenomenon is in its objective social and historical context, and
- (2) Its *meaning* can only be grasped as a unity of opposites.

Cause and effect are abandoned in favor of an explanation that presents relationships as the social meaning of a phenomenon, as well as an account of its past as its historical meaning. The phenomenon is not, then, in the sense of the naive realist, a building block of reality apart from human perception, but is rather seen as a part of that complex whole which

is the sum-total of human experience at one point in history. So, within the context of these two laws, it is possible to re-interpret the "alienation explanation," to see what sense can be made of the state of consciousness—the lassitude, passivity, resentment, apathy, and rebelliousness—the perception of which causes us concern.

Firstly, one must understand the disaffected student in terms of the relations into which he enters. Relationships, in their simplest form, can be seen as implying a unity of opposites. First of all, the student's consciousness, his conception of his being, is mediated by the world "external" to his consciousness. At the simplest level of self-definition, the student sees himself as not-wall, not-teacher, not-book; he does not define himself in a vacuum. His surroundings or, more exactly, the manner in which he experiences (acts) in those surroundings define him, and at the same time form his conception of who he is.

Secondly, it is crucial in our understanding of social problems to recognize the dialectic unity of opposites that is set up when a person relates to another person. In the course of relating, this person defines himself according to the other, but the other is at the same time defining himself according to the first. It turns out that each can only understand himself in terms of the other's understanding of him; but the other's understanding is a function of the first's understanding. Barring a past, a life-and-death struggle occurs in every relationship, as for each, his self-definition is at stake. In terms of this, R. D. Laing's agonizing becomes intelligible:

Interpersonal life is conducted in a nexus of persons, in which each person is guessing, assuming, inferring, believing, trusting or suspecting, generally being happy or tormented by his fantasy of other's experience, motives and intentions. And, one has fantasies not only about what the other, himself experiences and intends, but also about his fantasies about one's own experiences and intentions, and about his fantasies about one's fantasies about his fantasies about one's experiences, etc.¹⁹

Characteristic of R. D. Laing, the above emphasizes consciousness; the process of self-definition in terms of the relationships that one lives through is total, the person (and his problems) is defined. Also Laing looks at the problem from the point of view of a dyadic experience. How many times is the mind-boggling multiplied in the case of the triad, or in the classroom of twenty-six students? Or, in the school of two thousand? Only academics have the time and ambition to

attempt to conceptualize that. The important point to be made here is that a state of consciousness can not be properly understood in the terms of an explanation that sees it as a property of the students themselves (whatever that can mean). It can only be understood in terms of the relations into which the student is placed (enters).

However, our understanding that these relations *are* the life and mentality of the school student is incomplete if we view these relations as virginal. In other words, the students (and the problem) are to be understood as an ensemble of relations with a history. The student who is defined during his school days comes to that point in his life with a past that began at birth (notwithstanding certain theological wrangles). And, the same understanding applies to the school; it is what it is as a result of being not only a determinate part of society, but also as a result of its own process of development. Any problem, within it, then, must be understood not only in space, but in time.

It is at this point that another fundamental of the Marxian method is required—the necessity of seeing society in terms of infrastructural and superstructural relationships, for purposes of rendering the social object of enquiry manageable.

This method starts from the simplest fundamental relations we can find historically; in actual fact, that is economic relations.²⁰

It is to this “key” that a lot of criticism has been attached. Marxism, it is held, is “economic determinism”; it sees economics as causally prior to the rest of society. Or, it is also held, that dialectical materialism sees economic relations as the only ones that are important. Neither is the case; dialectical materialism recognizes the reality of relations in all areas of human experience. In a society characterized by scarcity, however, economic relations are the simplest ones, and because there is only one society, these relations are implied in all other “areas.” Henri Lefebvre explains:

The simple relations, moments, categories are involved historically and methodologically in the richer and more complex determinations, but they do not exhaust them. The given content is always a concrete totality Dialectical materialism is not economism. It analyzes relations and then re-integrates them into the total movement.²¹

Our venture into the aery realm of superstructural relationships, and especially the complexity of relationships involved

in consciousness attitudes, mentalities, and states of mind is much more likely to be properly directed if we have gained an understanding of the simpler relations involved. The most simple, fundamental relations to be found in the school are thus a way of coming to know that complex state of consciousness which we have been calling alienation. Alienation can then be expressed in the following terms:

- (1) The relations that the student mediates (i.e., the social relations of the school) which ultimately take the form of relations in the rest of society;
- (2) The "valuation" of the relations that the child mediates, this valuation being implied by these relations themselves, as well, of course, as by the relations of the person doing the enquiry;
- (3) The history of the social structure, of the dominant relations determining the form of the school.

It seems that the above is advocating not much more than R. D. Laing in his presentation of the dialectical method of enquiry—which is the pushing back of the boundaries of the object of enquiry through time and space in order to render it intelligible in terms of its context.

As we begin from micro-situations and work our way up to macro-situations, we find the apparent irrationality of behavior on a small scale obtains a certain form of intelligibility when one sees it in context.²²

The difference is that the reality that we begin with never was the abstract problematic, the object of enquiry removed from its context. That is, the alienated students were never "alienated," nor "students" *in their own* right. They were only "alienated" and "students" insofar as they stood in certain relationships to other people and objective circumstances in a certain social institution at a certain point in its history.

alienation in second-order mediations

Istvan Meszaros provides a simple method for understanding the way in which man mediates his social reality, and ultimately how he is alienated, by creating a distinction between first and second order mediations.²³ The first order mediations can be seen in the way that man actively relates to his social world (or nature) as part of it. (The discussion of the preceding section.) These first order mediations are ontologically prior to those of the second order which can be seen as the

wealth of man's objective creations that mediate his activity in his world (mediate his mediations). Into this category would fall creations such as technology, bureaucracy, capital profit, money, institutionalizations, as well as countless other social shibboleths.

On one level of analysis, it is possible to see alienation in terms of second order mediations when they are isolated as hindrances to man's social activity. In this positivist and undialectical sense, it is possible to isolate very quickly the meaning of the student's alienation—his passivity, resentment, etc.—by pointing to the institutional processes, rules, and configurations of the school that bind the student's activity.

According to the materialist dialectic, however, alienation would be seen more properly in the contradictions that occur at all levels of the schooling process between first and second order mediations. In fact, the two cannot be separated, except as the hopeless factors that Plekhanov discussed. The following example should serve to illustrate the nature of the contradiction:

In the Marxian analysis of capitalism, the classic contradiction is the simple economic relationship that exists, and becomes clarified in the course of history, between use-value and exchange-value. The first order mediation can be seen as occurring when man engages in production in order to gain the satisfaction of his needs—defined, of course, at the historically-appropriate level. The meaning of his activity is ostensibly in the use-values that he is creating. The second-order mediations, in fact, define the form that his production takes under capitalist arrangements. It is, from this point-of-view, the production of exchange-value, in which configuration the labor-power (or, the laborer himself) is seen as exchange-value also.

When the person's activity (work) does not result in the satisfaction for which he is working, because of the dominant relations of work (economic relations), then his alienation from his product, activity, etc., emerges in reality. It appears superficially to be due to the second-order mediations (the economic reifications) under which he labors, but in fact, the second order mediations are the *form* of his activity, and cannot be separated. In a certain historical socio-economic form, *satisfaction of needs takes the form of the satisfaction of the demands of the market*. When it no longer does, *when coincidence becomes contradiction*, then alienation becomes evident, and revolution immanent. The historical development of pro-

duction (man's first order mediation) demands the dissolution of relations that have turned from the form of development of production into its fetters.²⁴

Applying this model to our problem, alienation in schools becomes a reality when, due to the social relations, the form imposed upon their activity by such things as the structures of the school and the structures of the economy, the purposes for which the children engage in schooling are not fulfilled but are negated. If one is so inclined, he can study this phenomenon from the point-of-view of what happens to the individual student who finds that the activity in which he indulges does not satisfy his purposes at the same time as it "satisfies" the institutional requirements. Or, he could study it from the point-of-view of the society of which the school is a determinate part, and in terms of whose dominant relations it is fully understood. In this case, the social production summed up as "schooling" can be seen as fettered by the social relations most closely implicated in its functioning.

From the first perspective, the historically-appropriate needs that bring people to school are denied satisfaction by the demands of the school relations which are a part of the demands of the totality of social relations, which have turned from the form of the satisfaction of these needs into their negation. It is here that we can examine the manner in which the "learning" and "teaching" that students and teachers do is negated by such relations as give meaning and force to the schedule, curriculum, school quota, finance, examinations, etc. At this level, the wealth of liberal criticism, itself a mystification, takes hold and remains.

We are less accustomed to enquire from the perspective of social needs (not separate from the above) and to see how alienation occurs when the social needs that motivated the institution of schooling are no longer being satisfied. A major "social need" is to "pass on the culture," the knowledge and skills vital to the perpetuation and development of the socio-economic form. The task of schooling, as it relates to this social need, would be of the order of the initiation of novices into dominant social forms, the rationalizing and enhancement of these forms through research, etc.

It can be seen how these would come into contradiction with the dominant social relations of the school when it is fulfilling other expectations of the market. For, the task then becomes the passing on of knowledge and skills needed

to ensure production at its economically-appropriate level. Within these relations, the school survives and prospers only insofar as it takes the form of dominant relations in advanced capitalist society — finance, centralization, accountability, etc. are all corporate concerns that are appropriate to any large institution in society, and so they come to be the school's.

On the one hand, the second-order mediations are satisfied as the school corporation rationalizes its own operations to render them more compatible with dominant market relations. On the other, it is the development of this sector of the "public domain" to render it more justifiable in terms of (private) capitalist enterprise, e.g., by providing the arena for the profitable investment of capital.

Finally, the relations of schooling are inseparable from the relations of the contradiction-bound Canadian political economy itself. One of the emerging crises concerns the ability of the relations demanded by Canada's hinterland economy to contain the developing production which was the very promise or meaning of its becoming such an economy in the first place. That the production fostered under these forms is now in contradiction can be seen in the university for instance, as the demand for non-existent jobs on the part of graduates, or on the level of the public school, as the futility of continuing in an "education" that was, after all, geared towards job expectations that were partially the effect of the promise of inflowing foreign equity capital.²⁵

In our liberal-democratic (capitalist) society, the power to make the important decisions is based on wealth, i.e., property, the control of the means of production. Public good is seen in terms of social production and the direction is ultimately interpreted by those who control production in terms of their interests, of course. "Public" then, takes on the character of the class interests of those who control production, and that in turn comes to be synonymous with the interests of the most powerful of them. "Private," then, pertains to the demands of the single interests, insofar as they deviate from the interpretation of "public." In the Canadian political economy, an interesting contradiction is developing in the national bourgeoisie between those whose interests demand a strong position for national capital (represented by the Committee for an Independent Canada), and those whose interests are "continentalist," implying the continuing takeover by foreign capital. This contradiction has increasing

relevance for the whole Canadian society, and certainly for the type of indoctrination meted out in the schools.

The basic dichotomies operating in the Canadian political economy emerge, in time, as the principal dichotomies in the school. For instance, there are those who have as their interests the expansion of the schooling process, and then, there is the "public interest" which is at this point in history in the direction of fewer graduates and lower education costs. The "public" is, from this point-of-view, in favor of retaining the myth that sees schooling as coincidental with market expectations, e.g., having jobs available for all graduates and they must continually fight against the "private" interests which would continue developing the institution in such a way as to turn the coincidence into contradiction.

The problem of alienation was never, then, properly defined only in terms of the perceived apathy, resentment, or emotional state of the students at school. If it were, the proper stimulants à la *Brave New World* would be equal to the task of providing a solution; the type of psychological uplifting to be obtained by the use of drugs, new media, and the like, not at all alien to present practice in the schools, would suffice. But if the problem, of which the psychological state is a part, is raised to the level of contradictions basic to the political economy of Canada, then we should not be surprised if it is not answered by the liberalization of "drug rules," exciting media, or "groovy" group therapy sessions If the alienation of students can only be completely understood in terms of the conjuncture of historical circumstances at which they must try to produce a satisfactory life, then a much more decisive sort of therapy is required.

footnotes

1. T. B. Bottomore (ed.), *Karl Marx: Early Writings*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1965, p. 122.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 124.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 127.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
5. Eric Fromm, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion*, New York: Trident Press, 1962, p. 44.
6. Paul Tillich, "The Person in a Technical Society" in *Christian Faith and Social Action*, J. A. Hutchinson (ed.), New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953, p. 150.
7. Jules Henry, *Culture Against Man*, New York: Random House, 1963, p. 283.
8. John Holt, *How Children Fail*, New York: Dell Publishing Company, Delta Books, 1964, p. 167.

9. Abraham Maslow, *Towards a Psychology of Being*, Princeton, N.J.: Van Nostrand, 1962, p. 33.
10. Paul Goodman, *Compulsory Mis-education*, New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1956, p. 21.
11. Recognizing that the state of dissatisfaction of the observer is inextricably wound up in the nature of his object, one in a sense is always left with this question. Perhaps, the matter of finding an "objective base" is, in the final analysis, a political ploy.
12. G. Plekhanov, *The Materialist Conception of History*, New York: International Publishers, 1940, p. 16.
13. *How Children Fail*, *op. cit.*
14. Jerry Farber, "Student As Nigger."
15. Marshall McLuhan, "Classroom Without Walls" in *Selected Educational Heresies*, William O'Neill (ed.), Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman, 1969, pp. 294-6.
16. Ivan Illich, "Why We Must Abolish Schooling" in *The New York Review of Books*, Vol. XV, No. 10, pp. 28-33.
17. See Bertrand Russell, *Our Knowledge of the External World*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1926.
18. See, Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962.
19. R. D. Laing, *Self and Others*, London: Tavistock Publications, 1961, p. 154.
20. H. Lefebvre, *Dialectical Materialism*, Trans. by J. Sturrock London: Jonathan Cape, 1968, p. 85.
21. *Ibid.*
22. R. D. Laing, "The Obvious" in *Dialectics of Liberation*, D. Cooper (ed.) Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin Books, 1968, p. 15.
23. I. Meszaros, *Marx's Theory of Alienation*, London: Merlin Press, 1970.
24. Louis Feuer (ed.), *Marx & Engels: Basic Writings*, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1959, p. 44.
25. Foreign equity capital is not only accepted, but actively courted with the understanding (unquestioned until recently) that it does create jobs. There have been reams of studies to disprove this amongst which the following would make basic reading: P. Sweezy "The Future of Capitalism" in *Dialectics of Liberation*, *op. cit.*; P. Baran and P. Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1966; I. Lumsden (ed.), *Close the 49th Parallel, etc.*, Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1970; H. Magdoff, *The Age of Imperialism: The Economics of U.S. Foreign Policy*, New York: Modern Reader Paperbacks, 1969; J. Laxer, *The Energy Poker Game*, Toronto: New Press, 1970; and K. Leavitt, *The Silent Surrender*, Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1970.