




## Conceptual Article

# Schools of war

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In his classic *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845), Friedrich Engels argued that workers engaged in industrial action gained knowledge of economic processes, tactical awareness in struggles and grasped the value of solidarity in the face of employers' assaults on pay and working conditions. These struggles constituted "schools of war"; significant learning experiences for workers, argued Engels. Yet schools of war can take other forms, such as struggles against the *capitalisation* of education; educational institutions becoming sites of capital accumulation and preparation for capitalist work. In this sense, education has become a battleground as its privatisation, commodification, marketisation, commercialisation and monetisation have gathered pace in many countries since the second half of the twentieth century. This article argues that there are two main fronts in the war over the penetration of education by capital in contemporary society: the business takeover of education, as educational institutions become value- and profit-making sites; and the reduction of education to labour-power production. It explores these two fronts of war in terms of education policies in England and Brazil and argues for the establishment of forms of education beyond capitalist states and capital's commodity forms.

**Keywords:** Education policy, privatisation, commodification, labour-power, Marxism, schools, universities, alternatives

## I. Introduction

Since the end of the post-War boom in the mid-1970s many leading capitalist countries have been experiencing falling profit rates on investment of capital. For Andrew Kliman (2009a), the 'oil crisis' recession of 1973-75 that signalled the end of the post-War boom did not destroy sufficient volumes of capital and devalue capital enough to restore profitability. Rather, policy-makers have preferred to manage 'the relative stagnation by encouraging excessive expansion of debt' (Kliman, 2009b, p.1).

The turn to neoliberalism – by pro-capitalist think-tanks and also voters during the recession of 1979-82 – yielded 'a wave of Right-wing politicians – Margaret Thatcher, Reagan ... and many others who promised to tame big government and let market forces, lower tax rates and deregulation bring the good times back' (Levinson, 2017, p.7). After the Great Recession of 2007-09 there was another turn to Right-wing political leaders – e.g. Trump, Bolsonaro, Johnson – on the basis that populist leaders would 'know how to make slow-growing economies great again' (Ibid.). Yet the fundamentals have not changed, and 'the long-run rate of profit – the level toward which the rate of profit tends in the long-run, all else being equal – is *chronically* too low to permit a healthy rate of economic growth', according to Kliman (2009b, p.2 – original emphasis).

In these circumstances corporations and banks in advanced capitalist countries have searched for new forms of value production and profit; they have scoured the globe for manufacturing relocations, devised a raft of fancy financial products and gorged on debt, low interest rates, quantitative easing, and hand-outs and sweeteners from capitalist states. They have also looked to turn state revenues into private profit.

State education services have become part of this scramble for more favourable sites for value creation and new sources of profit. The value of the world education market was \$4.9 trillion (US dollars) in 2015 (Verger et al., 2017, p.325, Rikowski, 2017, p.35), making it tempting for business penetration. As Rikowski (2017) indicated, 'venture capital in education was nearly \$2 billion (USD) in 2014, showing a 45% increase 2009-14 during the years of the Great Depression' (pp.35-36). Verger et al. (2016) pointed to the spectre of the Global Education Industry (GEI) in their seminal study of education privatisation. Additionally, Verger et al. (2017) note 'inexorable growth' in the GEI. This growth is uneven internationally, due to differing degrees and

effectiveness of state nurturing of the business takeover of education services and also to calculations regarding profit-making by businesses surveying possibilities for getting in on the action. The business takeover of education – rather than outright privatisation – in the most advanced capitalist countries appears to be a favoured option. This is where businesses run (but do not own) educational services on contracts with national, regional or local states, or individual schools, colleges or universities. State revenue is churned into private profit in this process.

In this article we explore and expand upon a remark first made by Friedrich Engels in *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845), and developed by Peter Bell and Harry Cleaver (2002) that class struggles constitute ‘schools of war’, and push the idea further in relation to the incursion of commodity-forms in contemporary education. The following section introduces Engels’s idea of schools of war. We then set forth an argument regarding ‘war on two fronts’ in terms of Marx’s rendition of the two great commodity forms in capitalist society: labour-power and the general class of commodities. This is followed by two sections on commodity-form wars in schools in England (Scotland has its own schools system) and higher education in the United Kingdom, and schools and higher education in Brazil, where the idea of ‘schools of war’ is given contemporary empirical life in educational institutions in these countries. On the basis of the material in the preceding sections, the conclusion develops a strategy for the de-capitalisation of educational institutions, a strategy for victories in the wars over education. This strategy is based on alienating and banishing capital in education today.

## 2. Schools of War

In the course of exploring Marx and Engels’s studies of economic crises during the 1843-1850 period, Bell and Cleaver (2002) noted that Engels paid particular attention to these in *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (Engels, 1845). Engels held that in struggling against the consequences of these crises, the working class, by trying to maintain their wages in the face of the employers’ drive to lower them, were engaged in wars. Strikes, sabotage, and unionisation in the climate of the economic crises of the 1840s in England constituted “schools of war” for Engels, argued Bell and Cleaver (2002, p.9). Workers gained knowledge and tactical awareness in these struggles and saw the practical effects of solidarity in the face of employer assaults on wages and working conditions. For Engels, although class struggles at the point of production, by themselves, did not decide anything regarding the transition to socialism, nevertheless: ‘They are the military school of the workingmen in which they prepare themselves for the great struggle which cannot be avoided’ – the ‘decisive battle between bourgeoisie and proletariat’ which Engels believed ‘is approaching’ (1845, p.251). These ‘schools of war’ – strikes and other forms of working class struggle – have stood as valuable learning situations for workers in capitalism to this day.

Schools of war also emerged in educational institutions in the nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century – and not just in terms of strikes by teachers and students – but also in terms of struggles against the *capitalisation* of education, education *becoming capital* in terms of the commodity forms that it generates. Schools of war, in this sense, have become more obvious and open from the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, as some teachers, students and parents became engaged in struggles against education – its institutions and processes – becoming subsumed under the rule of capital. Educational institutions are war zones in contemporary societies (see Benn, 2011). The enemy is capital and its human representatives, as they attempt to impose particular forms of learning, teaching, knowledge and social control pertinent to commodity production and the value-form of labour on education workers, the means of educational production and students.

Awareness, by our side, of this war and the nature of the battles, is crucial. As Dave Hill has argued, by ‘struggling we become conscious/aware’ of the fact that we are at war with the ruling class and representatives of capital (Hill, 2019, p.102). Furthermore, notes Hill, the ruling class recognise that they *are* in a social war as they seek to control, curtail and undermine workers’ power. They practice ‘class war from above’ according to David Harvey (2006, cited in Hill, 2012, p.2).

### 3. War on Two Fronts

There are two principal fronts in the war over education in contemporary society regarding its capitalisation. This particular war is being fought on the terrain of capital around two commodity forms: labour-power and the general class of commodities. As Marx noted in *Theories of Surplus Value – Part I*: ‘the world of commodities is divided into two great categories: On the one side, labour-power. On the other side, commodities themselves (Marx, 1975, p.171). There are two fronts on which we confront and combat capital as it worms its way into education institutions.

First, regarding the second category of commodities noted by Marx, there is the business takeover of schools, as noted above. That is, businesses seeking to make profits out of state education by using various methods to convert state revenue for funding education gained primarily through taxation, into private profit. In order for this to occur, various foundational processes must be in place. It is not only the commodification of educational processes and means of educational production that must be developed. Marketisation of educational commodities, commercialisation (e.g. advertising and promotion of educational products for sale), and monetisation (pricing practices and policies) must also be generated for the sale and purchase of educational commodities. And all this presupposes *competition* in education, for: ‘Competition is the mode generally in which capital secures the victory of its mode of production’ (Marx, 1973, p.730), and ‘competition is nothing more than the way in which the many capitals force the inherent determinations of capital upon one another and upon themselves’ (Marx, 1973, p.651). Competition ‘executes the inner laws of capital’ (Marx, 1973, p.752) and takes place amongst for-profit education providers and multiple contests in terms of attracting students and persuading public education institutions to engage in contracting out education services. The generation and development of all these phenomena in education make for the *capitalisation* of education: education becoming capital in terms of value production (the basis of capitalist profit) and the emergence of abstract labour, the substance of value.

The second front concerns struggles over what Rikowski (2002) has called the social production of labour-power in capitalism. This is the moulding and shaping of humans for capitalist labour. In capitalist society, the social production of labour-power is institutionally fragmented, into nursery, primary second, further vocational, and higher education. It also includes labour-power development in various training, mentoring and staff development institutions and programmes. Labour-power is also developed ‘spontaneously’ when working in capitalist labour processes. In relation to contemporary education, the social production of labour-power is expressed in ideologies such as ‘employability’, the drive to generate ‘work-ready graduates’ and obsessive education policies such as the focus on science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) subjects to the detriment of humanities arts, and social science subjects. As Marx noted, after Adam Smith: ‘education produces labour-power’ (1975, p.210). At heart, today, the social production of labour-power is becoming the drive to convert labour-power, the capacity to labour, into *human capital*; the human as a form of capital.

Of course, military rhetoric has been applied to education in a number of other ways. Hence, Stephen Law (2006) writes about a ‘war for children’s minds’ in terms of *values* (as opposed to value), and in this sense there are many wars founded on religious, gender, ‘race’ and a vast array of other values within education. Law focuses the ‘war for children’s minds’ in terms of the struggle for Enlightenment and Liberal values in education. In many countries, schools are recruiting grounds for the military; forging a direct relation between schooling and war. Current arguments and conflicts about the decolonisation of education throw the spotlight on past imperialism and national liberation struggles. Contemporary education figures in various ‘culture wars’ in many countries, where school curricula are at issue between groups pushing for opposing value-sets in schools, or where ‘cancel culture’, anti-woke and free speech issues are the focus of value rifts in higher education. There are also many struggles over the discourse used in schools, especially over business language, acronyms and concerns arising from educational financialisation. The language of business seeps into schools.

These culture and discourse wars can be viewed as value-conflicts in education within contemporary society that can be accommodated within the framework of capitalism (though sometimes with increased regulation by Police and State powers). Of course, such discourses can reflect or nurture practical and policy changes in

education at the national state, regional or local government or individual school levels. But intellectual and practical attacks on the cell-form of capital, the commodity, aimed at weakening the power and existence of capital in education, constitutes a more serious blow for pro-capitalist representatives and the development of capital in education. Creating alternative educational processes and institutions where commodification and all its attendant forms (the marketisation, commercialisation, monetisation, and competition) and the powers of State, Money and Police are increasingly marginalised towards banishment, poses much more of a threat and a deeper foundation for the education of the future than struggling over educational discourses, values, practices and policies that presuppose and work within the framework of capital. Seeking to terminate the capitalisation of education through intellectual and practical attacks on capital's commodity-forms and generating alternative educational institutions aiming at the banishment of capital cuts through to the core of capital's existence and development in education.

#### **4. Schools of War in England and the UK: The Future Bites**

There is no doubt that the UK General Election result was a blow for those seeking to inject more hope, progress, equality, and radical adventures into education in England. The Conservative majority obtained in December 2019, allied to a Right-wing Brexit outlook, has yielded opportunities for the Conservative government to pursue class war in the education system with renewed vigour. The coronavirus pandemic has opened new opportunity doors for yielding education up to capital.

In terms of the schools sector, the slow but sure movement of schools' business takeover is likely to continue under the Conservatives indefinitely. Even before he became Education Secretary from 2010-2014 in the Conservative / Liberal Democrat Coalition, Michael Gove argued in favour of for-profit schools (Grimston & Oakeshott, 2010, p.1). Businesses were drawing up plans to 'revolutionise state education by taking over the management of hundreds of schools, as a result of politicians' opening the door to new service providers' (Hurst, 2010, p.6). When Michael Gove became Education Minister in 2010 he promised to give state schools the 'opportunity' to break away from local authority control and become independent Academies, where business interests could play a larger role (Harrison, 2010). Academies were originally set up by Tony Blair's New Labour government in 1998 for creating new secondary schools in areas of disadvantage and low educational attainment.

The Conservatives manipulated policy drift regarding Academies after 2010: to expunge local democratic control, to have direct control of schools' funding, and to encourage the formation of federations of Academies as embryonic for-profit outfits. They also extended the programme to primary schools and brought in the Free Schools initiative where parents' groups (sometimes backed by businesses) could set up new schools where they were dissatisfied with existing provision. Free Schools were masterminded by Dominic Cummings, Gove's special adviser and recently special advisor to Prime Minister Boris Johnson. In 2012, Gove, as Education Minister, expounded on what he described to *The Times* newspaper in December 2012 as 'a war footing' regarding teachers' pay (Grimston & Griffiths, 2012, cited in Hill et al., 2016, p.21). The 'schools of war' in Engels's sense clearly existed for Gove as a leading representative of the ruling class overseeing the nation's schools system!

The current Education Minister, Gavin Williamson (ironically a former Defence Minister), is keen to push on with Academies and Free Schools (Whittaker, 2019). The drive to generate for-profit schools will continue. Struggles against this imperative are also continuing, with the Anti Academies Alliance (AAA) and parents' groups scoring some notable victories. The AAA has also shown numerous examples of corruption, scamming and criminal activity by Head and senior teachers in Academy schools, yet this, and resistance to the Conservative strategy for schools, has failed to block the academisation juggernaut as a whole.

Regarding higher education, the Conservatives are keener than ever to attempt to turn the student loans / fees system into the generation of new financial products. As with mortgages and car loans, the aim is to create conditions for loans to be packaged up as commodities and sold to investors. The Labour Party's policy of ending the student fees regime at the 2019 General Election threatened this strategy.

The Conservatives have also brought in measures to control teachers' labour through the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF). The former aims to gauge research quality that is the basis for research funding allocations, and took over from the old Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), first run in 1986. But the TEF has wider significance. From 2020, the TEF results on 'teaching quality' will determine whether higher education institutions have the right to put up their fees. Key effects will to develop the higher education market further but also reward universities for students' outcomes, thereby embedding employability into universities' operations more decisively.

On the social production of labour-power, university provision is being structured towards STEM subjects. Universities, especially new universities, have been closing down humanities subjects – particularly philosophy – for the last ten years. They have seen the Government's writing on the wall. Dominic Cummings, Prime Minister Johnson's special adviser, is keen to set up new STEM institutions (see Collini, 2020) but also to create a new, independent agency for high-risk, high-payoff research, with some details of this new venture published by the Right-wing think tank, Policy Exchange (Morgan, 2020). This projected institution rests on Cold War ideology and visions of creating something similar to the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA, and DARPA after 1996) that was set up to rival and surpass the Soviet Union's technological achievements of the late-1950s (Mansfield and Owen, 2020). For Cummings, information technology education is especially crucial within STEM policies. But apart from history (especially history of science and technology, championed by Cummings), for the humanities, arts, and social sciences the future bites.

Under the cover of Covid-19 concerns in relation to student welfare, the UK Department for Education (DfE) issued a policy document on the *Establishment of a Higher Education Restructuring Regime in Response to COVID-19* last July (DfE, 2020a). The military and authoritarian messages in the document's title set a strident tone. The DfE (2020a) document promotes a two-fold funnelling or channelling process for labour-power production in UK higher education. First, labour-power production, 'delivering the skills the country needs' (DfE, 2020a, p.3), is to become a key consideration for future higher education funding decisions. National labour-power output via higher education is emphasised but higher education has a particular role to play in meeting regional and local labour-power needs, it is argued. Thus, UK higher education should be squeezed and driven to give labour-power production an enhanced priority. Secondly, labour-power production is to be channelled via STEM subjects more decisively, thereby downplaying the role of social sciences, arts and humanities in terms of their perceived significance in the nation's labour-power production capacity through higher education. The extent to which these two labour-power funnelling processes are taken up by higher education institutions will partly determine their funding prospects, but will also be significant in decisions regarding bail-out in universities going bust as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Those universities offered money for bail-out will be expected to restructure in line with the two funnelling priorities. Institutions will also be expected to upgrade their capacity for online and digital education STEM courses where this is feasible. Overseeing all of this will be a supposedly independent Higher Education Restructuring Regime Board. Thus, the UK government is getting more serious about reducing higher education to labour-power production.

## **5. Schools of War in Brazil: The Ultraconservative Dominant Ideology**

With the rise of the far-right government of Jair Bolsonaro from the 2018 elections onwards, education has become the target of direct actions resulting from conservative thinking, in addition to being used as a blackmail measure with regard to the counter-reform of social security. These changes that education has been undergoing are expressed as authoritarian measures. However, it is noteworthy that the metamorphoses that education has experienced predates the current government, as conservative groups already permeated the Temer government.

Regarding the social production of the workforce, in 2004 the School Without Party movement (Movimento Escola Sem Partido) derived its beginnings from the attacks on the Catholic attorney of the State of São Paulo, Miguel Nagib. The forerunner of the movement sought to mobilise parents and guardians of students to create an association that would aim to "fight against the abuse of which children are being victimized" (Saraiva & Vargas, 2017, p.68).

This movement emerged with the objective of "giving visibility to the instrumentalization of teaching for political, ideological and partisan purposes" (Ibid.). The School Without Party movement has developed in these circumstances aimed at stimulating a movement of intimidation and persecution of teachers. The notion of indoctrination and moral harassment, from the perspective of the School Without Party, is so general and far-reaching as to make the schooling process unfeasible. Regarding the groups that built the bases of the School Without Party, it is clear that its origin arose through the articulation involving:

[...] extreme right groups and Christian-oriented fundamentalist religious groups, dissatisfied with the actions of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's (Lula) center-left governments, who took over the presidency in 2003. It should be noted that many of the educational policies adopted by the Lula government promoted social inclusion, combating racism, gender violence and homo and transphobia, among other topics. Such policies were initially coordinated by the Secretariat for Continuing Education, Literacy and Diversity (Secad), established in July 2004. It should be noted that Secad, which had diversity as one of the axes, within which the above-mentioned themes would be addressed, was instituted in the same year that the school without party movement was founded (Saraiva and Vargas, 2017, p.68).

In these circumstances, bill n. 193/2016, authored by Senator Magno Malta, seeks to insert in the Law of Directives and Bases of National Education n. 9.394/96 o, School Without Party. In this context of censorship and ideological persecution, two other Draft Laws (n. 7,180/14 and n. 867/15) were presented in the Chamber of Deputies. In addition, in 19 states and several municipalities, other projects arising from School Without Party were presented.

Although there is resistance to School Without Party, its presence permeates the conservative political debate that seeks to radiate its ideology as opposition to the Left and progressive ideas. Ultimately, this movement still has the strength to constitute an instrument of the extreme right to dilute the model of democratic and public education engendered by educators and civil society.

With all the metamorphoses experienced by high school, in 2016, under the Michel Temer Government, the debate began for its new reorganisation that took place through Provisional Measure n. 746/16, in which it reformed the high school curriculum within formative itineraries. However, mandatory subjects no longer have a presence in the curriculum, reverberating in repercussions in civil society and in the educators' movement. In 2017, it was sanctioned as Law n. 13.415/17, which establishes the guidelines for the implementation of the new high school in Brazil.

The reformers understand that Brazilian economic growth depends on overcoming educational obstacles, given that investment in human capital is productive, from a capitalist point of view. For Motta and Frigotto (2017, p.357-358):

In the scope of education, they would be necessary aspects to raise the conditions of competitiveness of Brazil in the international market: the investment of the quality of the High School, even with the increase of the school day, aiming at better reaches in the school performance; the restructuring of the curriculum, adjusting it to changes in the world of work, in accordance with the supposed education of the 21st century; the expansion of the number of vacancies; and curbing school dropout.

This new reform, with its intent focused on productivity through human capital development, seeks to meet the logic of the market. For this it is necessary to make the curriculum more flexible in order to make the implementation of this training model feasible. The similarity with this reform and the High School reform measures of the educational project of the military-business dictatorship in Brazil in 1964 was highlighted by Leher (2016), since Law n. 5,692 / 71 sought to contain the pressure for enrollments in public higher education and constituted a professional training model for simple work as a result of early professionalisation. In fact, the training intended by the current reform makes the secularisation and secularity of social life unfeasible, "manipulating young people with conservative values that intend to spread fear in the face of the uncertainties and complexity of the 21st century [...] Therefore, the referenced school in science, in art, in culture, therefore, in historical-critical reflection, it cannot be tolerated" (Leher et al., 2017, p.19). In addition, the aforementioned authors point out that:

The redefinitions of the curriculum denote the real objectives of [High School Reform]: to deprive workers' children "of a crucial dimension of human formation without which imagination and aesthetic, historical sensitivity, and creative making become rudimentary" [...]. After the common curriculum that tends to reinforce the minimalist character, the state, federal and private systems will have to establish educational itineraries that institutionalize educational dualism, further deepening inequalities between networks. It is about the early and simple professionalization of youth, mainly of the children of the working class, who are largely students in public schools (Leher, Vittoria and Motta, 2017, p.19).

The 3rd version of the Common Base National Curriculum (BNCC), brought up by the Minister of Education Mendonça Filho, from the Temer government, makes clear its orientation linked to the notes of international organisations, as well as the National Confederation of Industry (CNI). The BNCC is a document of a normative character that seeks to radiate learning skills throughout basic education, in addition to standardising the school curriculum without considering the local and social particularities of schools. The focus on skills development has guided the constitution of curricula in their respective education systems in Brazil throughout the 20th and 21st centuries.

The utilitarian character is proclaimed through the emphasis given to "knowing how to do" that refers to the pragmatic conception of teaching. In addition, BNCC incorporates the intentions of international organisations with regard to professionalisation through the constitution of training itineraries, in addition to the approximation of the base curricular organisation with what the document published by CNI in 2010, entitled *The industry and Brazil: An agenda to grow more and better*, in which the importance of basic education was pointed out in relation to the formation of the Brazilian workforce.

Basic education is the foundation for the process of training human resources for capital. To learn a profession and keep up with technological changes, it is necessary to have acquired a good capacity for reading, mathematics, interpretation and logical reasoning.

With this, we realise that there is a link between the political and ideological conception of BNCC with the notion of high school reform and evaluation policies, having as reference the Basic Education Development Index (IDEB), with the industrial sector (CNI), and high school brings the curriculum design that best fits this perspective. In the structure designed by BNCC for High School the subjects that are configured as mandatory curricular components are: Portuguese located in the area of languages and its technologies, and mathematics located in the area of mathematics and its technologies. In this sense, the other areas become virtual mandatory practices, in which their contents can be treated as learning devices for the mandatory components, thus using the veil of the supposed inter- or trans-disciplinary work. At the limit, Motta et al. (2018, p.321) synthesise the scenario of reforms in high school and the construction of the curriculum via BNCC:

The utilitarian character is proclaimed through the emphasis The effectiveness of the BNCC is closely associated with the process of strengthening the pedagogy of capital over the public school [...]. Initially, business coalitions, such as Everyone for Education, had been advocating curriculum standardization and competency descriptors, through a myriad of standardized assessment exams. The conversion of the Basic Education Development Index (Ideb) into law within the scope of the National Education Plan Law (PNE), and, more recently, the approval of the contents of the BNCC show that, from a normative point of view, the project the pedagogical work carried out by the dominant sectors is progressing impetuously. It printed a conservative content to BNCC - the concessions to confessional archaism were evident throughout the process - and they were equally successful in the High School Reform, printing itineraries that prevent students from obtaining a broad human education, referenced in Science, Art and in Culture. Although not organically linked to the dominant sectors, it is important to highlight the presence of religious confessions, especially neo-Pentecostals, and of the School without Party in educational debates, due to their relevant presence in the National Congress, undertaking an anti-secular and openly hostile agenda to the secularity of public education.

The panorama of lack of dialogue regarding the present reform has prompted students, teachers, schools, scientific entities, universities, social movements, unions to take a stand against the High School Reform. In the context of the edition of MP 746/16, hundreds of public schools were occupied by students who opposed the reform.

With regard to the privatisation of education in Brazil, Higher Education has the most developed scenario through public-private partnerships, transforming State revenue into profit. Universities and Science and Technology (S&T) are already experiencing a reduction in funding since the approval of PEC 55/16. In the pattern of capitalist accumulation emphasised by the current bloc in power, scientific and technological research has no space. Other South American countries are experiencing metamorphoses in the modus operandi of their higher education seeking to escape the crisis through coalitions that depreciate Latin American integration due to American and Chinese hegemony, in addition to complying with strategic alignments and bilateral agreements.

In countries with dependent capitalism with a direction linked to neoliberalism and conservatism, scientific and technological dependence is complete. For Leher et al. (2017, p. 21), "the application of intellectual property laws favourable to corporations inhibits Research and Development and public incentives can be restricted to foreign economic groups that simplify national production chains". Furthermore, the aforementioned authors point out that:

The ongoing political changes may also mean the abandonment of measures that enabled the relative expansion of public higher education. If, before, progressive governments bet on the simultaneous expansion of public and private-mercantile sectors, the austerity policies, strictly speaking, of counter-reform of the State, conducted by these new coalitions, can stop the financing of public universities in benefited of the transfer of resources to private ones. In Brazil, the aforementioned constitutional change that freezes public spending for 20 years, will mean a fall in social spending equivalent to 0.8% of the Gross Domestic Product per year. In 6 years, this would be equivalent to all funds for Brazilian education. (Leher et al., 2017, p. 21).

It is legitimate to consider that even if the World Trade Organization's (WTO) General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) has not been approved in Brazil, the commercialisation of education has advanced exponentially, mainly due to the expansive movement of fictitious capital. The penetration of investment funds, private equity, the expansion of educational corporations, mergers and acquisitions and joint ventures express well the movement of financialisation within Brazilian higher education.

With the implementation and deepening of the tax exemption policy for educational companies (Law n. 11.096/05 that instituted ProUni), especially with the public financing policy for Private Higher Education Institutions (Law n. 13.530/17 of the new Fies) and the indebtedness of Brazilian youth, the logic of diluting the boundaries between the public and the private sector became very explicit. At the limit, from this movement of capital within Brazilian higher education, "a single association of investment funds, comprising the Kroton, Anhanguera and Estácio groups, will have 1.5 million students, 400 thousand more than all 63 universities together" (Leher et al., 2017, p.21).

Michel Temer's coup government had agreed to the end of public universities. Now, the document entitled *A Fair Adjustment: Analysis of the efficiency and equity of public spending in Brazil*, published by the World Bank in 2017, showed that the Brazilian crisis was due to a fiscal crisis stemming from social demands such as education, health and security. These areas were responsible for the Brazilian public deficit, it was argued by the World Bank. Concerning education, the document was emphatic as it considered that investment in higher education is inefficient and regressive expenditure, since, according to the World Bank, public sector student expenses were about two to five times higher than for private sector students. In this investigative itinerary, the World Bank pointed to the need to dilute public universities, as the ideal would be the payment of tuition fees at public institutions and public financing at private institutions, with deepening of the Student Financing Fund.

Notwithstanding the confluence of the Temer government with the World Bank, republican institutions are not directly attacked without any response from civil society. To paraphrase Seki (2019, p.2):

The government cannot simply decree that public universities close their doors. Previous experiences against them indicate that attacking them can be as important as it is dangerous for a government with its characteristics. Facing these institutions can be a way to quickly burn popular support from the government, especially among the middle fractions. While the Brazilian bourgeoisie is willing to pay for higher education, as



long as everyone has to do so and their privileges in the unequal distribution of technical knowledge and professional degrees remain untouchable by attending schools of excellence, including abroad, for the rest of society, public universities represent the only way that is rationally apprehended to justify a certain expectation of social mobility - although it is for a small portion of young people.

Under Jair Bolsonaro's far-right government, higher education has been under attack since the first Minister of Education, Veléz Rodríguez, and gained a greater push with support from the second Minister, Abraham Weintraub, on the announcement of new 30% contingencies for the education through Decree n. 9,741, of March 29, 2019, which provides for budgetary and financial programming. This scenario is accompanied by episodes of ideological attacks on public universities and humanities courses.

In the week before [the announcement of contingency via decree], the new Minister of Education, Abraham Weintraub, announced in live video, alongside the president, the idea conceived in the Ministry of redirecting federal funding for humanities courses, such as philosophy and sociology, in benefit of areas that, supposedly, would give immediate financial returns to the trainees and the country. The measure does not find any legal device that allows it to be applied and it violates violently the administrative and pedagogical autonomy of the universities. In the clash with these institutions, this was the first most relevant act of the new minister, who subsequently declared that the contingencies determined by Decree no. 9,741 / 2019 would be concentrated in three institutions: University from Brasília (UnB), Federal University from Bahia (UFBA) and Federal Fluminense University (UFF). In an interview with the State of São Paulo, he justified that the three cuts stemmed from what he called “shambles”, “mess” and promotion of “ridiculous events”, in addition to, in general, showing low academic performance (Seki, 2019, p.2).

The resistance movement was constituted by the public universities themselves, by the social and student movements, by the National Association of Directors of Federal Institutions of Higher Education (Andifes), National Union of Teachers of Institutions of Higher Education Institutions (ANDES), and in response they started a movement to publish results, achievements, awards that made the minister's speech completely fallacious. The Ministry of Education (MEC), after the response of the resistance movement, retreated with regard to selective cuts, explaining that “the contingency criterion was' technical 'and that' if the pension reform [were] approved and the predictions of improvement in the economy in the second half if [confirmed] 'the contingencies could be covered” (Seki, 2019, p.1-2).

In these circumstances, the financial asphyxiation of the universities sought to effect two objectives explicitly exposed by Bolsonaro's extreme right government, namely, the supplementation of his ideological onslaught against the diversity of ideas, critical thinking and rigorous research developed in public universities, in addition to relentless pursuit of making pension reform legitimate, putting budget cuts as a countermeasure. In effect, the current ultraconservative government undertakes obscurantism in the Brazilian educational scenario and for Brazilian science.

## 6. Conclusion: Attacking Capital in Education

The most basic assumption for a struggle against the capitalisation of education is that the major concern of human representatives of capital engaging with education is *not education*. It is capital and its generation through commodity forms that yield profit within educational institutions. Of course, these same representatives of capital may well have their own pecuniary interests to heart, but their vampire-like greed is not the central point. The main point is that we attack *capital* in education, practically and intellectually; we must aim to stop and banish its development in education in terms of its commodity forms.

In terms of education, representatives of capital (and these may be found *within* education institutions) have to convince regarding the effectiveness of growing capital within education in various ways. Hence, they may seek to convince on such issues as cost, results in terms of better qualifications, lowering truancy rates, lessening gender, racial and other forms of inequality (especially for special needs education), and other factors. They have to advertise and convince leaders in public education that they can generate a better deal for students in manifold ways. Contracts could try to nail down these claims. However, once these claims are yielded to, then the political argument on anti-capitalist education is lost. Representatives of capital may well peddle arguments

about creating better education in various ways, while all the time seeking to nurture the growth of capital in education. This is what their actual *practice* boils down to.

On our side, as anti-capitalists, we must focus on banishing capital in education, and certainly not yielding to any arguments put forward by representatives of capital to the effect that they can aid the effectiveness of current educational institutions. They talk 'education', but focus on capital; we must talk and focus on anti-capitalist education and the banishment of capital in education.

In relation to the general class of commodities, the tasks ahead are relatively easy compared to labour-power production. Business takeovers of nurseries, schools, colleges and universities – *in toto*, or in relation to particular functions, subjects, departments or leadership roles – must be challenged and terminated. The same applies to all the mystifying, patronising and pretentious business discourse.

For labour-power production, the strategy is necessarily more complex. This is because in contemporary society we have to sell our labour-power to survive. Thus, if anti-capitalists in education do not recognise this basic point then they will not get very far in taking many with them. Students in schools, colleges and universities will hope to develop their own labour-powers for capitalist work in line with any career choices in order to thrive within their national capitals. Malott and Ford (2015) recognised this problem and argued for anti-capitalist education within public institutions while anti-capitalist teachers also engage in nurturing skills and capacities that students can use to gain qualifications and jobs in the capitalist labour market.

The problem with this dual strategy is that the capitalist state is itself a *form* of capital (Holloway, 1991; Holloway & Picciotto, 1991), and will tend to impose demands on schools regarding labour-power production through an array of pro-capitalist education policies, while making life difficult for anti-capitalists in education. On this last point, for example, the UK Department for Education published a guidance document in September 2020, ostensibly about relationships and sex and health education, urging teachers in schools not to use material from anti-capitalist organisations in their teaching (DfE, 2020b). Given the strength of capitalist states, and given their propensity to support value and profit through active labour-power production policies dressed up as education policies, often under the cloak of 'employability' or 'human capital', then continued anti-capitalist pedagogics within public education institutions is always facing an uphill struggle. Of course, many courageous teachers working in public education institutions manage to insert societal critique and the critique of capitalist education into their teaching, as the vast literature on critical and revolutionary pedagogy attests. And more along this line can be done in higher education than in schools, where national curricula, vicious inspection regimes and state monitoring are more intense. Yet it is difficult to conceive that national and local states will ever just sit by as teachers and students reconfigure public education as anti-capitalist education where capital is outlawed and the *critique* of capitalist work and labour-power production are driven to the fore. There must be *alternatives* where education is *freer*, if not free of capital and its human representatives, but at least working towards such freedom.

Thus, the establishment of educational forms beyond the orbit of capitalist states would seem the logical strategy, for teaching and research, in order curtail the power of the state form to limit, box-in and flatten education on the ground of capital. To create education workers' co-operatives would be a first significant step in dissolving capital in education, allied to similar developments being nurtured in other social spheres (see Neary, 2020, for more on this). In such educational contexts, the critique of capitalist education, labour and Life can be given fuller development. An educational maxim devised by Mike Neary heralds the 'emancipation of the intellect and of knowledge' through the call to: 'Do nothing that is instrumental for capital' (Neary, 2020, p.148). Workers' co-operatives in education founded on this principle must always keep it in view to forestall any backsliding into the embrace of capital. For Neary: 'This lesson is an important lesson for us all to learn, and the essence of any pedagogy that refers to itself as critical' (Ibid.). It is an essential lesson for all those seeking the dissolution of capital in education and society.

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