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'Remaking the World': Neo-liberalism and the Transformation of Education and Teachers' Labour

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Introduction

In the introduction to his short book on a brief history of neo-liberalism, David Harvey (2005: 1) begins by arguing: “Future historians may well look upon the years 1978-80 as a revolutionary turning point in the world’s social and economic history”. Four significant events acted like epicentres in the unfolding of the transformation of the post war order: in 1978, Deng Xiaoping took the first steps toward liberalising the Chinese economy; in 1979, Paul Volcker took command of the US Federal Reserve and changed monetary policy whilst in that same year Margaret Thatcher took on the power of the unions and pledged to end inflationary stagnation. In 1980, Ronald Reagan was elected President of the USA, and armed with Volcker’s policies, set about implementing a set of reforms that were aimed at curbing union power, deregulating industry, and creating more liberal conditions for finance to operate on the national and the global stage. “From these several epicentres, revolutionary impulses seemingly spread and reverberated to remake the world around us in a totally different image” (Harvey, 2005: 1).

Three decades later, few disagree that the globalisation of a neo-liberal utopia, “like continental drift” (Bourdieu, 1998: 1), has become hegemonic. In doing so, its promoters have remade the world, including the world of education. Out with the collective and welfare; in with the individual and freedom. This tectonic shift has transformed how we talk about education, teachers and learners, unions, parents’ groups and professional associations. In short, it has altered the conditions for knowledge production, along with the spaces and sites for claims-making around education. With education yoked more closely to national and regional economies, schools and universities are now universally mandated to (efficiently and effectively) create the new breed of entrepreneurs and innovators; the value-driven minds who will spearhead the battle for global markets and consumers, and a bigger share of the spoils. Education, once untrammelled virgin territory, is also being initiated into the world of property rights, markets, trade and rating agencies (Molnar, 2006; Hentschke, 2006; Ford, 2006; Hatcher, 2006); a pre-pubescent services sector that offers the promise of wealth creation in a utopia of endless wealth creation (Bourdieu, 1998).

How might we explain this transformation in the post-war education sector settlement? A core argument of this paper is that the mobilisation of neo-liberal ideas for reorganising societies and social relations, including the key institutions involved in social reproduction, is a class project with three key aims: the (i) redistribution of wealth upward to the ruling elites through new structures of governance; (ii) transformation of education systems so that the production of workers for the economy is the primary mandate; and (iii) breaking down of education as a public sector monopoly, opening it up to strategic investment by for profit firms. To be realised, all three aims must break down the institutionalised interests of teachers, teacher unions, and fractions of civil society who have supported the idea of education as a public good and public sector, and as an intrinsic element of the state-civil society social contract.

There is, however, also considerable evidence that rolling out of neo-liberal policies and programmes across the globe (Tickell and Peck, 2005) has been highly uneven (Harvey, 2006). The creation of this new Foucauldian regime of truth has experienced tectonic jolts because of its own internal contradictions (cf. Fine, 2001), because the histories and institutions of locales cannot be airbrushed out of existence (Fourcade-Gourinchas and

Babb, 2002; Madrid, 2003; Harvey, 2006; Ong, 2006), and because in myriad ways, neo-liberalism has been visibly and vigorously contested (cf. Waterman, 2001). The presence of contradictions, cultures and contestation does not, of course, enable us to wind back the clock, as if the events that make up history can be made not to matter. And nor will I argue that the neo-liberal programme has delivered entirely negative outcomes. As always, life is more complicated than that. However, I will argue that neo-liberalism has transformed, albeit in both predictable and unpredictable ways, *how* we think and *what we do* as teachers and learners, and it is therefore important we make these things evident to ourselves. In doing so, I hope that it enable us to see the limits of the closer relation between education and capitalism, the centrality of class, labour and exploitation (Cox, 2005) to our explanations of what is going on, as well as enable us to begin the task of confronting how to overcome and transcend those limits. In this introductory chapter on neo-liberalism and teachers labour, I intend to look back to the beginning of this epochal change and its epicentres with the explicit purpose of making clearer what, at the time, was not so clear; the nature of the project that was underway and more particularly, what the struggle was about.

Epochal change, epicentres and the collapse of the class compromise: enter struggles over redistribution and recognition

Neo-liberalism did not arrive un-announced from the shadows, though it might well have felt this way.¹ Nor, as we shall see, are its fundamental ideas particularly new. Rather, neo-liberalism's pedigree can be traced to liberalism; a utopian project promoted by philosophers such as Locke and Hobbes committed to the ideals of personal freedom and possessive individualism (Macpherson, 1962: 263-4). Liberalism also stood opposed to collectivism. The core ideas of liberalism are outlined by Macpherson; freedom from dependence on others, the individual is the proprietor of his own person and capacities; human societies consist of a series of market relations, and political society is constructed to protect an individual's property and goods. In other words, supreme value is given to individual autonomy, agency and property.

Neo-liberalism can be understood as a variant of liberalism. As Olssen observes:

...neo-liberalism reinforces many of the central axioms of classical liberalism. It reinforces those pertaining to the relations between the individual and society, the conception of freedom, the view of the self as a rational utility maximiser, the view of the distinction between public and private spheres as separate, and the rejection of any conception of a public good over and above the aggregate sum of individual ends (Olssen, 2000: 482).

¹ At the time, I was working with a group of Headteachers employed by the Department of Education, Western Australia on 'school development'; a very progressive initiative that had devolved some power, authority and accountability to the school and its community. The new reforms were disarmingly called School Development, however they had a very different feel to them to those we were attempting to work with and write about. As I got to study these further they were indeed different. These school development initiatives were part of the New Public Management initiatives that spoke to more economically inflected ideas like efficiency, effectiveness, public accountability, managerial accountability.

Neo-liberalism differs from liberalism in one important way; its commitment to neo-classical economics; that is, recognition that some state intervention is necessary to ensure that Adam Smith's hidden hand of the market can function. This means that freedom of the market, the right to free trade, the right to choose and protection of private property is assured by the state.

Neo-liberalism, as a variant of liberalism,² can be compared with 'ethical' or embedded liberalism which formed the foundation of an exceptional phase in history; the golden years of the welfare state (Hobsbawm, 1994: 258). As Hobsbawm noted, post-war capitalism was unquestionably "a system reformed out of all recognition...a marriage between economic liberalism and social democracy" (1994: 270). With embedded liberalism flourishing, little ground was given to the proponents of liberalism. Keynesian socioeconomic policies were widely deployed especially in the OECD countries in order to institutionalise demand management, deficit spending, collective bargaining, monopoly pricing and counter-cyclical monetary policies. There was also significant spending on utilities and social and political infrastructures, as well as various collective goods including health and education (Jessop, 2002; Brenner, 2004). However, by the 1960s things had begun to change. The balanced compromise between defence of welfare and a liberal international economic order that had sustained three decades of growth and progress was now seriously destabilised (Cox with Schechter, 2002). The golden years were over.

Two important dynamics were in crisis and ruptured together. Their epicentres gathered force to generate the conditions for epochal change; on the one hand, the post-war accumulation strategy (Harvey, 1989; 2005; 2006; Hobsbawm, 1994) and on the other, the project of modernity with its conception of progress and enlightenment (Santos, 2004).

The story of the post war accumulation strategy and its eventual exhaustion tends to begin with the 1970's crisis and following recession. However, the post-World War II settlement had shown sign of serious problems as early as the 1960s, with declining profits and the movement of industries to the less developed countries, particularly Asia. As David Harvey (1989: 141-2) wrote of the time and which I quote at length:

By then, the West European and Japanese recoveries were complete; their internal markets saturated, and the drive to create export markets for their surplus output has to begin. And this occurred at the very moment when the success of Fordist rationalising meant the relative displacement of more and more workers from manufacturing. The consequent slackening of effective demand was offset in the United States by the war on poverty and the war in Vietnam. But declining corporate productivity and profitability after 1966 meant the beginnings of a fiscal problem in the United States that would not go away except at the price of an acceleration in inflation which began to undermine the role of the dollar as a stable international reserve currency. ...It was about this time that the import substitution policies in many Third World countries (particularly Latin America), coupled with the first big push by multinationals

² Cox calls this current phase of liberal informed policymaking 'hyper-liberalism' rather than neo-liberalism for it tries to subsume all social life within the economic. Embedded or ethical liberalism, Cox argues, can be more accurately described as 'neo', or a deviation from liberal theory.

into off-shore manufacturing (particularly in South-East Asia) brought a wave of competitive Fordist industrialization to entirely new environments, where the social contract was either weakly enforced or non-existent. International competition thereafter intensified as Western Europe and Japan, joined by a host of newly industrialising countries, challenged United States hegemony within Fordism to the point that the Bretton Woods agreement cracked and the dollar was devalued. ...More generally, the period from 1965 to 1973 was one in which the inability of Fordism and Keynesianism to contain the inherent contradictions of capitalism became more and more apparent.

The net result was that when the Bretton Woods system collapsed in 1973, the US's share of output had fallen by 10 percentage points from 1950, and its share of exports had fallen to less than the combined total of Germany and Japan (Michie and Smith, 1995: 25-26).

The 1973 recession shook the capitalist world, leaving it vulnerable to more than two decades of subsequent economic restructuring, and social and political readjustment. An epochal change was under way. However, neither the form nor the content of the restructuring were, or indeed are, pre-given. Instead, these cataclysmic events opened up the terrain to new struggles between social forces—in this case between neo-liberals and (ethical liberal) Keynesians. Even before the crash, “a minority of ultra-liberal economic theologians” (Hobsbawm, 1994: 409) had attacked the domination of Keynesian thinking, promoting instead the unrestricted free market as the model of economic development. The attack was also directed at what was regarded as increasingly unruly labour, protected by the entrenched interests of unions.

Enter neo-liberalism as a political and class project

By 1974, neo-liberals were on the offensive (Marchak, 1991: 93), though they did not come to dominate government policy until the 1980s. While seemingly a spontaneous emergence, intellectuals like the Viennese economist Hayek and Chicago-based Milton Friedman had spent a considerable amount of time since 1947 critiquing welfare-based democracies. As Hobsbawm (1994: 409) observes:

The battle between Keynesians and neo-liberals was neither a purely technical confrontation between professional economists, nor a search for ways of dealing with novel and troubling economic problems. ...It was a war of incompatible ideologies, both sides put forward economic arguments. The Keynesians claimed that high wages, full employment and the Welfare State created the consumer demand that had fuelled expansion, and that pumping more demand into the economy was the best way to deal with economic depressions. The neo-liberals argued that Golden Age economics and politics prevented the control of inflation and the cutting of costs in both government and private business, thus allowing profits, the real motor of economic growth in a capitalist economy, to rise. In any case, they held, that Adam Smith's 'hidden hand' of the free market was bound to produce the greatest growth of the 'Wealth of Nations' and the best sustainable distribution of wealth and income within it; a claim which the Keynesians denied.

Chile was the first testing ground for this new model of economic coordination, following the ousting of Salvador Allende's socialist government and their explicit nationalising agenda in a bloody coup in 1973. Now, a pure neo-liberal experiment was put into place; privatisation of all publicly-owned resources (aside from copper), the liberalisation of finance and openness to Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), freer conditions for trade, and state withdrawal from many social policy programmes. This 'experiment', however, ended in crisis in 1982, replaced by a more pragmatic approach to neo-liberal theory and its implementation.

From the 1980s onward there was a purge of all forms of Keynesian policy by the international organisations and lending agencies and national governments in what Tickell and Peck (2005: 174) term 'roll back' neo-liberalism. As they note: "In its own terms, neo-liberalism's roll-back phase was a phenomenal success. Markets and institutions were transformed as the politically legitimate remit of state intervention was redrawn" (ibid).

As events unfolded, throughout the 1980s neo-liberal policies (under the structural adjustment programmes of the IMF and World Bank) were imposed on developing countries in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa as they reeled from the effects of the worst economic recession since the 1930s.³ Similarly in the developed world, neo-liberal policies were embraced by political parties of the right and the left (cf. New Zealand and Australia) when they were faced with mounting external debts and rapid inflation following application of Keynesian economic policies.

Three central principles key ideas feature in most models of restructuring: deregulation, competitiveness and privatisation (Cox, 1996: 31). Deregulation refers to the removal of the state from a substantive role in the economy, except as a guarantor of the free movement of capital and profits. Competitiveness is the justification for the dismantling of procedural state bureaucracies and range of welfare provision that were built up in the post war period. Privatisation describes the sale of government businesses, agencies or services to private owners, where accountability for efficiency is to profit-oriented shareholders. These principles, implemented with the slogan—there is no alternative—were sold as short-term pain for long term gain (Kelsey, 1993: 10). Labour unions and their activities were strictly curtailed, progressive social policies were wound back and restructured to reflect market values, taxation systems were reviewed in favour of the ruling classes and capital, many state utilities were privatised, and systems of regulation—particularly around finance—were liberalised (Jessop, 2002; Tickell and Peck, 2005; Harvey, 2006). Through prising open the growing fissures in the post-war class compromise and hastening its demise, neoliberals and their allies 're-levelled' and 're-bordered' the playing field, putting into place a set of rules (see Washington Consensus) that directed the steady flow of class assets (cultural, economic, social) upward toward the ruling classes. Neo-liberalism also legitimated opening up new spaces and means for profit-making as well as generating the means for the exploitation of labour, for nothing can be allowed to exist outside of the market, including education,

³ During the 1980s, while world annual economic growth averaged 3.1%, in Africa it declined from 4.2% (1965-1980) to 2.1% (1980-1989). In sub-Saharan Africa this was even more extreme. Between 1980-1988 the average growth rate was -2.4% (Burkett, 1991: 474). In Latin America the average growth rate during the two periods shifted from 6.1% to 1.6% (1980-1989) (Robinson, 1998: 45).

knowledge production, and our brains. Harvey (2006: 43) calls this ‘primitive accumulation’ by which he means the continuation and proliferation of accumulation practices that Marx had treated as primitive in the rise of capitalism, for instance, the conversion of various forms of property rights into exclusive property rights, the suppression of rights to the commons, the commodification of labour power, and so on (2006: 43). A profound epistemological shift and new ethic of social and political life emerged unleashed by this epochal change. This came to be known as the ‘Washington Consensus’ (Williamson, 1993: 1329-1336); an idea frequently linked to globalisation.

So, how are they related? Boaventura de Sousa Santos’ (Robertson and Dale, 2004; Santos, 2004) offers an interesting perspective on this when he argues that globalisation is a particular localism that moves across borders and becomes hegemonic. In this case, neo-liberalism is a political project that has global extension and local rooted-ness. When seen in this light, it possible to imagine ideas other than neo-liberalism, with global extension and local rooted-ness.

More conventional views tend to see globalization as denoting on the one hand “... the expanding scale, growing magnitude, speeding up and deepening impact of transcontinental flows and patterns of social interaction” (Held and McGrew 2002: 1) and on the other the shifting trajectory of power away from nation states as the primary scale on which power is organised and exercised (Held and McGrew, 2002: 8).

Digital technologies and the internet are deeply implicated in these changes. They enable the rapid movement of ideas, images, finance, goods and services across space (Appadurai, 1996), and as we shall see in the following section, technology firms are increasingly active as providers of education, while technologies themselves have been used by education providers to extend their services into new spaces, and create new markets. .

Digital technologies are also important in neo-liberal regimes because of their ability to rapidly provide information in the marketplace. For markets to work effectively, choosers need to be able to respond to signals about price, quality, availability, flexibility, and so on. It is not surprising that the pre-eminent position of knowledge and the idea of a ‘knowledge economy’ and ‘information age’ coincided with the neo-liberal political project.

Neo-liberals and their allies

The early success of neo-liberalism can also be found in the absence of an apparently viable alternative for the left who had begun to confront both external and internal critiques and failures; of socialism as a possible alternative and of the labour movement as a means to deliver social change to a range of social groups (Waterman, 2001). Previously submerged groups coalesced around a new means for furthering those projects and interests that had been denied in what Nancy Fraser (1995) has called ‘recognition’ or identity politics. This discontent fed into a much larger crisis of modernity—the once dominant hegemonic paradigm within the socio-cultural sphere.

Neo-liberalism found sufficiently broad appeal—particularly in the idea of individual freedom—for it to take hold. Neo-liberalism was able to articulate with a range of interests,

discourses and agendas within civil society that had been submerged in the post-war class compromise. In the USA, for example, neo-liberal ideology spoke to those groups and communities—for example, the Christian Right, liberal feminists and black communities, whose identities and projects had been previously denied by the largely white male class project (Apple, 2001; 2006). The discourse of ‘rights’ was also mobilised as a means to realise freedom through opening up previously dominated state spheres to other actors, in essence offering the very real possibility of setting up new institutional structures this time using a market-based rationale (as with Charter Schools – see Ford, 2006).

Neo-liberal policies also resonated amongst the ruling classes. To be sure, the post-war redistribution policies impinged in the ruling classes, however growth within the economy in the post war period, and the spectre of socialism as a possible alternative, acted to shore up the post war settlement. The 1970s crisis of accumulation, however, affected everyone, including the ruling classes. Harvey (2005) argues that when growth collapsed, the upper classes moved decisively to protect their interests, politically and economically. Neo-liberalism was the perfect economic engine and political mantle to drive forward this project.

Neo-liberalism and its contradictions: from the Washington to Post-Washington consensus

Neo-liberalism, however, had its own internal problems. Its brutal assault on the lives of worker and families, in what Santos has called ‘social fascism’ (Dale and Robertson, 2004), created problems of considerable social dislocation and social unrest for neo-liberal state regimes and associated global agencies and projects such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI). Social movements were also able to act decisively in locations that bought the struggle over the globalisation of neo-liberalism as an inevitable global order to the world’s attention (see Seattle).

Toward the end of the 1990s there was a real sense that dogmatic market fundamentalism was being undermined in both the centres of neo-liberal orthodoxy—the UK and the USA. Just as Thatcher and Reagan had played important roles in shaping and transmitting the Washington Consensus, the election of Clinton (1992) and Blair (1997) represented a shift in the mode of economic development. Neo-liberalism underwent a transformation. In the UK the emergence of a ‘third way’—between the state and the market—fitted well with the critiques of the Washington Consensus era (whilst not seeking a return to the post-war period of Keynesian economics).

In the World Bank, Chief Economist Joseph Stiglitz in 1997 called this new phase, the ‘Post-Washington Consensus’ (Stiglitz 1998; Stiglitz 2002). Fine (2001: 139) describes its features as follows:

First, it is sharply critical of the Washington Consensus and seeks an alternative in which state intervention is greater in depth and breadth. Second, it rejects the analytical agenda of state versus market, arguing that the two are complements and can work together and not against one another. Third, if less explicit, it poses an alternative agenda for development economics and policy debate, seeking to establish the appropriate role of the state in view of market

imperfections. Fourth, it also brings the social back into the analysis as the means of addressing, and potentially correcting, market imperfections – rather than simply creating them as for the Washington Consensus for which the world would be a better place if it were made more and more, if not completely, like the market.

Interestingly, as Fine (2001) argues, this was not a rejection of the broad trajectory of neo-liberal economic policy but rather its deepening and widening (Stiglitz 1998). In that sense, it can be seen as a logical extension of the ‘good governance’ agenda to embrace wider concerns.

While state intervention remained focused on areas of ‘market failure’, the expansion of these areas was notable. If the 1980s represented a period where the dominant focus was on markets, and the early 1990s markets and states, then the late 1990s can be seen as a re/turn to the social but always with a focus on the primacy of markets. Stiglitz critiqued the Washington Consensus as too narrow in focus.

The Washington consensus advocated use of a small set of instruments (including macroeconomic stability, liberalized trade, and privatization) to achieve a relatively narrow goal (economic growth). The post-Washington consensus recognizes both that a broader set of instruments is necessary and that our goals are also much broader. We seek increases in living standards—including improved health and education— not just increases in measured GDP. We seek sustainable development, which includes preserving natural resources and maintaining a healthy environment. We seek equitable development, which ensures that all groups in society, not just those at the top, enjoy the fruits of development. And we seek democratic development, in which citizens participate in a variety of ways in making the decisions that affect their lives (Stiglitz 1998:30).

A key policy initiative during the later 1990s centred on the concept of social capital (Fine 2001). This concept merits explanation as a central idea in the policies and politics of the Post Washington Consensus. According to the World Bank:

Social capital refers to the internal social and cultural coherence of society, the norms and values that govern interactions among people and the institutions in which they are embedded. Social capital is the glue that holds societies together and without which there can be no economic growth or human well-being. Without social capital, society at large will collapse, and today’s world represents some very sad examples of this (cited in Fine 2001: 158)

Social capital and the production of trust became increasingly seen as one of the key non-market externalities that could promote growth through social cohesion. In a period of increasing social fragmentation, civil conflict and destabilisation produced by migration, immigration, market volatility, and widespread economic and social exclusion, processes of social cohesion through enhanced social capital were seen as a vital antidote to social instability.

Neo-liberalism a flawed model

It is worth at this point turning to the work of Karl Polanyi (1944) for some further help in understanding why market liberalism is so utterly flawed as a way of organising economies and societies. In his book *The Great Transformation*, Polanyi critiques the work of market liberals like Hayek. In reflecting on why a period of relative stability was followed by fascism in the 19th century, Polanyi argues that the emergence of market liberalism—the idea that markets are self-regulating—emerged as a means of managing the problems of industrialisation (first transformation). This directly led to the Depression, fascism, and so on (second great transformation).

Market liberalism is based on the view that markets are self-regulating and that markets operate separate from and above or outside society. However, Polanyi argues that markets have always been embedded and the goal of a fully self-regulating market that is disembedded is a utopian project. It cannot exist. As Bourdieu remarks:

This tutelary theory is a pure mathematical fiction. From the start it has been founded on a formidable abstraction. For, in the name of a narrow and strict conception of rationality as individual rationality, it brackets the economic and social conditions of rational orientations and the economic and social structures that are the condition of their application. (Bourdieu, 1997: 1)

In pursuit of this project, however, market liberals must commodify human beings and nature. However, human beings and nature will resist these pressures because they are not real but fictitious commodities. In other words, land, labour and money are not meant to be sold as commodities and will not respond to the signals of supply and demand. It is here, Polanyi argues that market liberalism is based on a lie; firstly, it is wrong or unethical to treat nature and human beings as commodities whose price is determined by the market; and, secondly, despite the argument that the market is self-regulating, it is evident that the state must play an active role in managing these three important markets. If the state is driven out of the role of balancing the social forces, then individuals must manage their own more fragile circumstances. However, this also creates particular problems for both the state and the economy; for the state, the question of legitimacy becomes particularly pressing. That is, who is the state supporting, if not its citizens? And if capital is routinely privileged before citizens, then how does the state manage this asymmetry in its power—given its mantle of defender of democracy and social justice? From the other direction, for the economy to function well, labour needs to be willing, healthy and socially-behaved. If not, then are more likely to choose other locations in which to invest.

Polanyi's (1944) extreme scepticism about disembedding the economy gives rise to his idea of the 'double movement' – the *laissez faire* movement to expand the scope of the market, on the one side, and the protective counter-movement which tries to manage and minimise this on the other. In other words, the movement toward markets requires an alternative movement to stabilise it (the state, and more recently, civil society through concepts like social capital). Bringing the state back in, however, also throws light on the fundamental contradictions of liberalism and its variations, making it an unviable political project in the long term given its propensity to generate social instability, social polarisation and social injustice.

Neo-liberalism and Education: the Transformation of a Sector

There are a number of important ways in which education sectors in the developed and developing economies have been transformed by neo-liberal policies. As we will see, however, these policies have been unevenly implemented and experienced, giving rise to important differences across locales, regions and countries. They have also been resisted by workers and their unions—including teachers unions—in some cases more successfully than others.

A number of key principles were deployed in the restructuring of education sectors which changed the mandate (what it is that the education system should do), forms of capacity (the means through which the mandate can be realised e.g. fiscal and human resources) and mechanisms of governance of the education sector (that is, the means for coordinating the system).

In terms of the ‘mandate’ for education, the economy was prioritised above all else. Education systems were mandated to develop efficient, creative and problem-solving learners and workers for a globally-competitive economy, while teachers were to demonstrate that they had had taught their young charges through national (SATS) and global (e.g PISA, TIMMS) systems which demonstrated ‘added value’.

With regard to ‘capacity’, there was an overall reduction in financing the public sector, including education, though evidence suggests that cuts in the education budget could be implemented in a variety of ways (Grootaert, 1994). In general, aside from Latin America whose expenditures on education have risen from 3% to just under 4.5%, most other regions experienced an overall decline in expenditures to education as a % of GDP (ILO, 2004: 47). The cuts were more likely to affect females rather than males in that, when family finances are really tight, males are more likely to be provided with the opportunity to learn (UNDP, 2005: 24-25). It is important to note that cuts in the welfare/benefit base, as well as to health and housing, also impact on education so that any assessment of the affect of neo-liberal policies on education should look at social welfare policies more generally in order to discern the indirect as well as the direct effects.

Education providers were not only placed under pressure to use funds more efficiently but they were encouraged to seek additional sources of funding from local households (based on rates of return analysis)⁴ and international households (fees, including full fees from foreign fee-paying students), the business sector (for instance through local donations, direct funding of school infrastructures, public-private partnerships) and from marketing their own services (including curriculum expertise).

⁴ The World Bank relied heavily on rates of return to education analysis as the main rationale for education investments in developing countries (cf. Psacharopoulos, 1994). These studies purported to assess the public/private cost of education and the public and private gain thereof. These led to families being asked to fund some of the cost of education, because of the private rather than public benefit. In NZ, rates of return analysis were used to justify the calculation that the public return was 75% and the private return was 25%, which the household would be asked to pay in the form of fees (Stephens, 1997).

There was also an attempt to change the basis for determining a teachers' salary as in many countries this was part of a system of collective bargaining. Teacher unions have been placed under enormous pressure to yield to performance-based pay, while governments have used new governance arrangements, such as Charter Schools (USA), City Technologies (UK) and City Academies (UK) to offer differential wages to teachers. Moore Johnson and Landman (2000), commenting on the situation for teachers in these deregulated schools in the USA, observe that teachers were particularly concerned over their right to raise complaints and resolve problems, job security, and levels of pay. They note that "in some cases, the uncertainty distracted teachers, fuelled suspicion and undermined loyalty" (op. Cit: 113). Evidence suggests that more generally, the relative increase or decrease in the position of teachers during this period was related to government and union strength (Woodhall, 1994). The ILO (1996) argue that overall, teachers salaries were seriously affected by austerity measures during the 1980s, while Bonal (2002) shows that fiscal austerity had a negative impact on the quality of teaching and teacher attendance, with educators in Latin American countries having to take up a second job in order to survive.

Finally, new governance systems have been put into place a number of elements were introduced. A new model for managing their public sectors has been implemented, based on what Hood (1995) has called New Public Management (NPM) (Hood, 1995). This involves a number of elements: funding is based on outcomes; some services are decentralised while others are centralised; departments and institutions have been set into competition with each other through various choice schemes in order to emulate a market (Gewirtz et al, 1995; Ball, 2003). The third sector has been invoked to provide additional support to schools as well as involve themselves in the governance of the education provider; education providers are compared with each other, for instance through league tables, in order to increase performance, and education providers and their teachers were audited in order to ensure that the government's money was well spent. A 'private' element has been introduced into education. Initially this took the forms of privatising inspection and auditing; outsourcing custodial, catering, testing, counselling and management services, along the establishment of new kinds of education providers—such as Charter Schools (Canada and the USA), City Technology Colleges and City Academies in the UK, language schools in Australia. However, more recently, the private-for-profit sector have made significant inroads into education. In the USA, many charter schools are run by for-profit firms, while services, such as testing and tutoring make up the growing and highly profitable education industry, complete with rating agencies providing weekly information to investors seeking to manage their 'education investment portfolios' (cf. Hentschke, 2006). Multi-national firms, particularly those involved in the technology industry (for instance Microsoft, Cisco Systems, Sylvan Learning systems) have deepened their involvement in education across the globe, exploring the provision of digitally-based education content and provision.

Who wins and who loses from neo-liberal policies and programmes?

The question remains, then, as to whether neo-liberalism as a development model, has managed to deliver long term gain despite short-term pain, and if so, is gain widely distributed (based on the liberal market thesis that the gains trickle down? Or, have the spoils been largely grabbed by a small class fraction? In this section I will begin by reviewing the bigger evidence on this question, before focusing specifically on the education sector.

There is good evidence to suggest that the globalisation of neo-liberalism has not delivered greater equality and reduced poverty across the globe, despite earlier claims by the World Bank and economists like Martin Wolf (2004). A series of reports (ILO, 2004; UN, 2005; UNDP, 2005) reviewing the affects of economic globalisation point to a slowdown in economic growth, greater informalisation, increased levels of inequality and poverty, and the marginalisation of the ‘fourth world’—Sub-Saharan Africa. Those countries that display the greatest levels of growth and decreased levels of poverty (registered in terms of the number of people who live under \$1.00 per day) are China and India, both of which did not follow neo-liberal economic policies. Indeed, when these two countries are removed, it is evident that there is an overall decline in the developed economies, at the same time featuring an increase in levels of inequality within a significant number of developed countries (measured through the GINI coefficient) (Robertson et al, 2006). Declining incomes has had a major affect on levels of participation in education—particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa.

What were the effects on the education sector specifically? We have seen already that, overall, levels of expenditure on education decreased rather than increased over the 1980s and 1990s, with the exception of Latin America. However the question that remains to be answered is whether this decline was felt more generally, or whether some classes or class fractions were able to either protect themselves from, or benefit from, the state’s neo-liberal policies and programmes.

Brint (2006: 185) provides good evidence that in countries such as the USA, the age of increasing educational opportunity ended around the time of the implementation of neo-liberalism; that is the early 1980s. Since the 1980s, the US has made fewer efforts to foster the socio-economic mobility of children from lower classes and minority groups through education (Karen, 2002). Most notably, the public resources to support equality of opportunity at the college level have declined.

At the leading private universities, tuitions are more than half the average family’s total yearly income. Without scholarship aid, children whose families are not in the top few percent of income cannot afford to attend these colleges, no matter how well qualified they may be. Even at public universities, fees have risen at nearly three times the rate of inflation since the 1980s, much faster than the incomes of all but the very rich (Brint, 2006: 185).

Similarly in the UK, choice policies have tended to favour the middle and ruling classes who are able to use their social, economic and cultural capital in order to secure an education at a private school, or at one of the high status publicly-funded comprehensive schools, whilst conversely, these schools can ‘cream skim’ the ‘best’ (largely middle and upper class) students thus reinforcing class divisions and relations (Robertson and Lauder, 2001). Poorer families as a result must accept neighbourhood schools or under-chosen schools whilst being blamed for their poor performance (Gewirtz et al, 1995) (Whitty et al, 1998), and while these schools are not necessarily ‘bad’, they have little or limited ‘value’ when it comes to other kinds of transactions in the education and wider labour market. The proxy for quality, where the school is in the league tables, not only opens up or closes off access to further privileges, but it produces the system of social stratification. Where the state has stepped in to alleviate the problem for poor families, research has found that these schemes have been dominated

by the middle class (Edwards et al, 1989). The picture is much the same in countries like New Zealand, where radical neo-liberal policies were implemented in the education sector throughout the 1990s. Lauder et al (1999) report a spiral of decline in working class schools, leaving teachers and students at risk of low morale, low funding, and poor performance. Transformations taking place in cities have also had an impact on the lower classes – in many cases being driven out of the big European cities, such as Paris, because of the rise in house prices and the development of business districts (Van Zanten, 2005: 158).”This results in concentrations of lower class and immigrant children in neighbourhoods and schools of the urban periphery which in turn leads to the kinds of socialisation inside and outside of schools that can be characterised as ‘peripheral’ in more than a geographic sense” (ibid: 159).

In looking further afield to countries that have not implemented neo-liberal policies in quite the extreme way that we see in the UK, USA and NZ, it is possible to see that class inequalities are diminished through schooling in Sweden and the Netherlands, where it is argued that both countries continue to pursue redistribution policies whilst committed to the values of social equality for the community rather than equal opportunities for individuals (Brint, 2006: 182-3).

In a recent study on markets and governance across five European countries (Belgium, France, Portugal, England and Hungary) by Ball and his colleagues (cf. Maroy, forthcoming) it is possible to discern quite different engagements with, and resistances to, neo-liberal education policies thus producing what Ong (2006) calls different modalities of neo-liberalism. How are these modalities produced? In the case of France, for instance, institutionalists Fourcade-Gourinchas and Babb (2002: 567), show that neo-liberal ideas did not possess strong organisational bases (in contrast with Britain and the USA) – there was no equivalent of the think tanks, press and financial sector. This resulted in France engaging with neo-liberal policies in a more pragmatic way than in Britain and Chile, where it was a highly political process. Never-the-less, it is still possible to see the broad contours of a neo-liberal settlement in France – the role of markets in economic regulation, the promotion of free trade of goods and capital, and the prioritisation of the fight against inflation.

There is good evidence that unions have played an important role in mediating neo-liberalism—a conclusion that I also drew in my own analysis of the history of teachers work in the USA compared with the UK (Robertson, 2000). Indeed unions work as a form of social capital, providing a network of resources that enable teachers to protect themselves from overt forms of exploitation. It is no accident that in order to discipline teachers as workers and extract more from them for the economy and capital that teachers’ unions would be under attack (Robertson, 2003). This of course has not been a straightforward process, though as Waterman (2001) and Munck (2004) point out many labour unions have been spectacularly poor at thinking through what it means to be a union in the context of globalisation, on the one hand, and the challenges presented by recognition politics.

Despite this, unions have been successful in stalling the onward march of neo-liberalism in some locations. Jones (2005) shows that the traditions associated with the post war reforms in Italy, France and England, specifically the natures of the social and ideological blocs in Italy and France, meant that it was possible to mobilise power and mount a concerted campaign of action opposing the neo-liberal shaping of education. Madrid engages with a similar question in a review of neo-liberal reforms across Latin America, showing that

variations in the implementation of reforms partly reflected differences in the intensity of labour's opposition to the reforms. So, too, does Murillo (1999) who demonstrates that the internal dynamics of teacher unions, in this case Mexico and Argentina, resulted in different kinds of political struggles and engagements. Torres et al (2000) in a study of teachers' unions strategies in education reform in the US, Canada, Japan, Korea, Mexico and Argentina, show that teachers' unions reacted to policy changes in diverse ways, in part shaped by the contradiction between the rights of teachers as workers and their view of themselves as professionals, and also an ambivalence over processes of rescaling powers upward and downward (centralisation versus decentralisation).

Where To From Here

It is tempting to think that neo-liberalism as a political and class project might implode because of its own internal contradictions; of offering 'freedom' but instead tightening the shackles of control; of commodifying all in its wake, and yet needing to legitimate itself as an ideology that has something for everyone. The evidence is clearer and clearer, as the days go by. Neo-liberalism might have caused us to rethink what we do and how, especially in teaching (perhaps teachers are more responsive to parents than they were; perhaps teachers have better resources to think about what works for which child and why) but in sum, the working and middle classes have paid a huge price. And while, for the moment, we can point to big and small struggles and victories, my hunch is that the battle has barely begun. All too silently, education has been rapidly commercialised, and is becoming big big business, protected by global regulations. There is increasing pressure on willing national governments (for example from the OECD and World Bank) for them to cut their losses and stop attempting to transform archaic, bureaucratic and difficult education systems and their teachers and to go with the technological solution. Personalised learning is the new buzzword; a learning experience ordered over the internet and packaged up 'just for me' (OECD, 2006). These developments are being promoted by the international agencies as the solution to a myriad of problems facing education policymakers; universal access to children in Africa to how to be a winner in the global knowledge economy. These developments are being protected by the legally institutionalised rights of capital—the new investors in education—in agreements being negotiated as part of the World Trade Organisation's General Agreement on Trade in Services (see Robertson et al, 2002).

Yet, there are alternatives emerging that also give us a way to think differently about what we might imagine as an alternative and how we might get there. This means, however, confronting face on, what has happened and why; it means daring to talk about the worsening conditions of teachers' work not as performativity but as exploitation; and it means to talk about restructuring and the transformation of teachers' work and workplaces as the outcome of a class project.

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