

ADULT EDUCATION AND SOCIALIST PEDAGOGY

Frank Youngman

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Volume 27

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SOCIALIST PEDAGOGY



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FRANK YOUNGMAN

First published in 1986 by Croom Helm Ltd

This edition first published in 2019

by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge

52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-138-32224-0 (Set)

ISBN: 978-0-429-43000-8 (Set) (ebk)

ISBN: 978-1-138-36078-5 (Volume 27) (hbk)

ISBN: 978-0-429-43292-7 (Volume 27) (ebk)

Publisher's Note

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Adult Education and Socialist Pedagogy

Frank Youngman



CROOM HELM

London • Sydney • Dover, New Hampshire

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Croom Helm Ltd, Provident House, Burrell Row,
Beckenham, Kent BR3 1AT

Croom Helm Australia Pty Ltd, Suite 4, 6th Floor,
64-76 Kippax Street, Surry Hills, NSW 2010, Australia

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Youngman, Frank

Adult education and socialist pedagogy.

1. Adult education 2. Communism and education

I. Title

374 LC5219

ISBN 0-7099-2911-0

Croom Helm, 51 Washington Street, Dover,
New Hampshire 03820, USA

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Youngman, Frank.

Adult education and socialist pedagogy.

(Radical forum on adult education series)

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

1. Adult education—political aspects—China—case studies. 2. Adult education—Political aspects—Portugal—case studies. 3. Adult education—Kenya—political aspects—Kenya—case studies. 4. Socialism and education—China—case studies. 5. Socialism and education—Portugal—case studies. 6. Socialism and education—Kenya—case studies. I. Title. II. Series.
LC5257, C6Y68 1986 374 85-30881
ISBN 0-7099-2911-0

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Biddles Ltd, Guildford and King's Lynn

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is a pleasure to thank publicly those who have helped me in producing this book. In Southern Africa I would like to thank those comrades who participated in many discussions about its theoretical foundations. Acknowledgement is due to the University of Botswana for granting me the sabbatical leave during which the bulk of the writing was undertaken. I am grateful to Lauren Vlotman for her work on the final manuscript.

In Britain, I wish to thank the following at the University of Hull - Noreen Frankland for her help in many ways, Barry Bright and Judi Irving for their moral support, and Paul Armstrong, whose erudition and encouragement I have especially valued. Lionel Cliffe of the University of Leeds made particularly helpful comments.

I also acknowledge gratefully the support of my parents Frank and Kathleen Youngman, and the solidarity and practical assistance of my wife Phora Gaborone-Youngman.

Finally, while acknowledging my intellectual debt to the many writers I have cited, I would like to emphasise that the sexist language which appears in quotations from other authors has been retained only in the interests of veracity to the original.

Gaborone, Botswana



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Chapter One

ADULT EDUCATION FOR SOCIALISM

Adult education is no longer marginal. In the last two decades there has been a massive expansion of educational programmes for adults. This expansion has taken place throughout the world, in both the advanced industrialised countries and the underdeveloped countries. In the industrialised countries, economic restructuring, technological development and demographic changes are among the factors which have led to the greater involvement of adults in educational activities. Surveys in the USA in the 1970s suggested that one in three adults participated in some form of organised learning.¹ In the UK a 1980 survey showed that a total of 47% of the adult population had engaged in educational activity at some stage after their initial education.² In the underdeveloped countries, strategies for national development include a significant adult education component, for example in programmes to modernise agriculture, improve public health and raise levels of literacy. In Tanzania in 1975 two and a half million adults participated in a nutrition education campaign.³ In Brazil the national literacy programme, MOBIL, reached thirty million adults between 1970 and 1978.⁴ Such examples illustrate the expansion that has taken place in adult education. This growth has occurred throughout the wide spectrum of fields that the concept of adult education encompasses, from basic education to professional training, from recreational activities to community development programmes.

The organisational structure of adult education remains very diverse in all countries. It stretches far beyond ministries of education to include other central government departments, local authorities,

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commerce and industry, trade unions, political parties, voluntary organisations and so forth. This organisational diversity makes it difficult to comprehend adult education as a whole. But grasping the essential unity of educational activities for adults is important because the recent rapid development of adult education has made it more integral to national systems of education. Indeed the expansion of educational opportunities beyond initial schooling for the young has contributed to education systems being conceived more and more as 'lifelong' systems which offer the possibility of 'recurrent' education at different points of the individual's life-span.

To see the unity of adult education and to locate it within a national system is to understand why adult education must be regarded sociologically and politically as part of the single social institution that is education. This is not to deny that there are important differences between the education of adults and the education of children. For example, the education of adults is seldom compulsory, usually part-time, and frequently occurs in contexts which respond to particular interests. Also the social position of adults is different, for instance in their personal autonomy and their experience of work. But these differences are subsumed within the wider social institution that also involves children and which has other age-related differentiations, such as kindergarten education. Consideration of adult education has to take into account that it is a part of the organised processes in society which systematically shape consciousness, develop knowledge, impart skills, and form attitudes.

It is within this context that the role of adult education in society needs to be analysed. The world-wide expansion of state-funded education for the young since 1945 has led to the great salience of questions about the political implications of education. For instance, the student movement of the 1960s which challenged the nature of university education in the advanced capitalist countries reverberated in wider questions about the nature and functions of education. Similar questions were vigorously addressed in China during the Cultural Revolution in the period from 1966 to 1976. The issues raised can perhaps be summarised in a single question: to what extent (and in what ways) is education a force for reproducing

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the status quo or a force for social change? Because of adult education's increased impact on social life, it is also faced more insistently by this question.

The political nature of adult education has received increasing attention since the early 1970s. The writings of Paulo Freire with their emphasis that no education is neutral have been particularly influential and some adult educators have begun to consider how adult education can contribute to social transformation. In doing so, as Hall has pointed out, they have started to recover a historical tradition in which adult education is linked to political action against capitalism.⁵ This tradition indicates that adult education has often been seen by socialists as an important front in the struggle to change society. For example, the growth of the labour movement in the industrialising countries of the nineteenth century led to active independent adult education programmes for workers, such as the Chartist meeting halls in England in the 1830s and the evening schools in Russia in the 1890s. Historical study shows that in different periods socialists have regarded adult education as a source of support for the economic and political struggle to overthrow capitalism and construct a socialist society. The re-emergence of this tradition in the 1970s has led more adult educators to consider the political implications of their own work. As Hall put it:

...in adult education, we may now have to look much closer at the role we are playing...As long as the share of the world's wealth is so unevenly divided between those who rule and those who produce, there will be a struggle.⁶ We must know which side of the scale we are on.

One result of this development has been a growing practical interest in the use of adult education as a means of advancing socialism in both the industrialised and underdeveloped countries. It is this interest which provides the rationale for this study.

A key problem facing socialist adult educators is how to achieve a unity of political theory and educational practice. In the burgeoning literature in English which considers adult education as a field of study, very few authors have taken an explicitly socialist perspective. The purpose of

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this book is therefore to contribute to the development within adult education of a socialist pedagogy, that is, an approach to teaching and learning which is based on principles consonant with socialist theory.⁷ This approach must be characterised by a distinctive perspective on matters such as the process of knowledge acquisition, the role of language and literacy, the social relations of the educational situation, the methods of teaching, the mode of evaluating learning and teaching, and the relation of learning to production and political action. The concept of a socialist pedagogy provides a politically-informed stance towards both the content and processes of the adult education encounter. Consistency between content and processes is important because an adult educator's political position is not only expressed in the choice of subject matter and learning materials but it is also mediated by the methods used and social relationships established.

The need to unify content and processes has been discussed by Giroux in his chapter 'Beyond the limits of radical educational reform: towards a critical theory of education.'⁸ Here he argues that on the educational left in North America 'two major positions stand out: these can be loosely represented, on the one hand, by the content-focussed radicals and, on the other, by the strategy-based radicals.'⁹ He suggests that those who focus on content give priority to challenging the dominant ideology and developing critical ideas, while those who focus on strategy (i.e. processes) give priority to challenging the hierarchical social relations of the classroom and developing personal autonomy. He argues that it is incorrect to separate the two aspects of education, criticising the content-focussed group for failing to see the ideological dimensions of the learning experience itself, and the strategy-focussed group for failing to locate classroom social relations within a critical analysis of the wider society. He concludes that there is a need for an integrated approach which is underlain by a coherent political theory:

...any viable radical educational theory has got to point to the development of classroom interactions in which the pedagogical practices used are no less radical than the message transmitted through the specific content of the

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course. In brief, the content of classroom instruction must be paralleled by a pedagogical style which is consistent with a radical political vision.¹⁰

This is a conclusion which I regard as being of great relevance to adult education because the problem of achieving an integrated approach arose for socialist adult educators in many different contexts during the 1970s. The relationship of content and form has been the subject of argument. For example, Yarnit has criticised much of the community-based adult education in England in the 1970s for 'an obsession with form at the expense of content' which he feels reveals a 'superficial radicalism'. He argues that socialist adult education must stress the content of what is taught:

To put content before form is not to deny the importance of pedagogy or to equate content with a perpetual diet of politics. It is merely to affirm that in the end if education is to grow deep roots in the working class then they will be nourished more by what people learn than by how they learn.¹¹

This example indicates that there is a tendency to dichotomise content and processes in socialist adult education which is similar to that identified by Giroux in radical school education. My aim in this book is to make a contribution to resolving this dichotomy.

This contribution consists of attempting to clarify the nature of a socialist pedagogy for adult education. Such a pedagogy seems to me to be less accessible to the adult educator at the moment than a socialist curriculum because most subject areas have their own body of socialist interpretation which can provide the basis for the selection and organisation of teaching content. My main concern is therefore with educational processes but this does not overlook the need to develop critical content. My focus is the analysis of learning theory in order to develop the principles of a socialist approach to adult education. However, before considering adult learning it is necessary to adopt a social theory which is fundamentally critical of capitalism and which can provide the broad theoretical framework within which to analyse educational issues.

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MARXISM AS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical position that I have adopted in seeking to develop a socialist approach to adult education is that of Marxism. Socialism as a concept is susceptible to different meanings although its common denominator, as Berki¹² has argued, is an opposition to capitalist society. A number of different socialist theories have arisen since the bourgeois economic and political revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth century established the capitalist epoch. The two main positions today are those of the social democrats and the Marxists. The social democrats envisage the possibility of a gradual reform of capitalism which will reduce its social injustice (for example, through the welfare state) while retaining its economic basis, namely private enterprise. The Marxists, on the other hand, see the necessity for a more fundamental transformation of society that will totally replace the capitalist mode of production by a new form of society, communism. This position is based on a well-developed theoretical tradition which provides both an overall explanation of society and the analytical principles for studying particular aspects of social existence. This seems to me to offer the most coherent and global account of capitalist society and how to change it, and in so doing it furnishes the conceptual tools for studying issues of education. It thus opens up the possibility of unifying theoretically a political goal for society at large with actual practices of adult education in specific social contexts. I have therefore adopted Marxism as the theoretical framework for this study, and I use the concept socialism to denote the revolutionary transformation of capitalist society as propounded by Marxism.

However, it is necessary to point out that Marxism is not a monolithic tradition. The writings of Marx and Engels between 1843 and 1895 were voluminous and the scope and time-scale of their work inevitably meant shifts in thinking, variations in analysis, and unfinished areas of investigation, despite the basic consistency of theoretical approach and political commitment. These ambiguities have been reflected in subsequent interpretations and applications, which exhibit many differences. The major figures of twentieth century

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Marxism include people such as Lenin, Lukacs, Luxemburg, Trotsky, Gramsci, Mao, Sartre, Althusser and Habermas whose writings represent a great diversity of views. But it is also true to say that attempts have been made to canonise the work of Marx and Engels and produce a single 'correct' version of Marxism. In particular, the use of their work as a unifying ideology by political parties has led to simplifications and dogmatism, so that Marxism has often been equated with the official positions of Communist Parties, especially that of the Soviet Union (because of its historical role as the first Marxist party to achieve state power). But such 'official' versions tend towards a closed system of thought and to absolute truths which are in contradistinction to Lenin's assertion of the open-ended quality of Marxism:

We do not regard Marx's theory as something completed and inviolable; on the contrary, we are convinced that it has only laid the foundation stone of the science which socialists must develop in all directions if they wish to keep pace with life.¹³

The very fact that theory arises within the context of particular historical situations and contributes to changing them means that Marxism has inevitably developed as new problems have arisen for solution. Indeed, it is better to conceptualise Marxism as a theoretical framework which can provide a guide to action than as a static, unitary body of thought and practice.

Since the criticism of Stalin at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956, there has been a renaissance of Marxist theoretical debate and analysis. In the 1960s, economic events (such as the end of the post-war period of expansion by the end of the decade), political events (such as the Sino-Soviet split, the war of liberation in Vietnam, and the crisis in France in 1968), and intellectual events (such as new editions of Marx, Gramsci and Lukacs) all contributed to the renewal of the Marxist tradition. This renaissance took place not only in Europe and North America but also in the Third World. During the 1970s there was widespread political activity influenced by Marxism (in countries as diverse as Chile, Italy and Mozambique) and a creative application of Marxist analysis in many areas of

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study (ranging from feminism to aesthetics to development theory). The renewed Marxist scholarship has been vigorous, iconoclastic and polemical, reviving earlier debates that had been frozen during the twenty-five years of Stalinist theoretical dominance and analysing Stalinism itself. Its new vitality has opened up fruitful lines of research in a wide variety of fields. This has been especially noticeable in the English-speaking world, where Marxism has had a growing impact on intellectual life despite the traditional prejudice of Anglo-Saxon empiricism against general theory. Marxism today therefore appears as a complex and many-faceted intellectual and political tradition. My own position within it will emerge as I apply it to questions of teaching and learning in adult education.

In undertaking this application I am able to draw particularly on the body of Marxist analysis of education which has been produced in the last decade as part of the general development of Marxist perspectives. The main focus of these studies has been the nature of education in advanced capitalist society. They have approached this question at two levels. The first is that of the relationship between education and society, considered at the structural level. Here education has been analysed from a historical perspective which locates it within the wider social context of the structure of class and power. The work of the North American writers Carnoy, Bowles and Gintis has been important in developing this political economy of education. The second level is that of the educational institutions themselves, considered in terms of their organisation, social processes, curriculum content and teaching methods, that is, at the cultural level. Here studies have investigated exactly how educational practices serve to maintain and legitimate the capitalist social order and what forms of resistance occur. This level has been explored by British sociologists such as Whitty, Young and Willis, and by North American curriculum theorists like Apple and Giroux. To some extent these levels have been analysed separately but it is increasingly recognised that they must be unified in a theoretical totality, for example in Apple's recent collection entitled (significantly) Cultural and Economic Reproduction in Education.¹⁴

The need to relate theoretical analysis to actual educational activity has not gone

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unrecognised either:

The importance of education for capitalism is clearly revealed by the state's action in taking control of educational institutions and expanding them; the question for Marxists is why. We can take it as given that education does fulfil a basic function for capitalism, the task is to understand this function.

But there is a further task for Marxists: to relate this theoretical understanding to day-to-day educational practice.¹⁵

To a certain extent, recent Marxist writers have put forward ideas for socialist educational practices which embody Marxist theory, for example, the contributors to Studies in Socialist Pedagogy.¹⁶ Thus I am able to refer to a small group of writers who have applied a Marxist theoretical framework to practical educational issues in capitalist society, although most of this writing has been on school education. In fact, despite the upsurge of Marxist scholarship that has taken place, there has been very little writing in English on the theory and practice of adult education from a Marxist perspective. This book attempts to go some way towards filling that gap.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF ADULT EDUCATION

I have noted above the need for educational studies to unite the structural level of analysis with the cultural level (of intellectual processes and social practices) in a theoretical totality. This is not an entirely straightforward task as the relationship between the two is one of the main sources of contention within contemporary Marxism. Kitching in his book Rethinking Socialism discusses how many of the new Marxist writers of the last twenty years have stressed humanist themes of alienation, human agency, consciousness, ideological oppression, personal liberation and so forth and have under-emphasised economic analysis of the class structure, material production, the dynamics of capitalist accumulation and so on.¹⁷ They have done so in a conscious attempt to distance themselves from the theories of economic determinism associated with the Marxism of the Stalinist era and hence

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from the political record of the USSR (particularly the crimes committed in the name of Marxism in the 1930s). But Kitching argues that in so doing they have adopted theoretical positions which are seriously flawed because they neglect the economic basis of society, which Marx regarded as fundamental for explaining political and cultural phenomena. He adds that 'A commitment to some of the central concepts of Marx's political economy need not necessarily lead to the adoption of elitist or Stalinist political positions.'¹⁸ However, it is undeniable that achieving a comprehensive exposition of the dialectical unity of the structural and the cultural, the objective and the subjective, is a long-standing problem within the Marxist tradition. Nevertheless, it remains a central goal, whose theoretical foundation was crystallised by Marx in a famous passage in his Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy:

In the social production of their life, people enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material production forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real basis, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general.¹⁹

This proposition that the economic structure conditions social institutions and intellectual processes is central to the Marxist study of education. However, specifying the exact relationship between the economy and the nature of education has been as difficult and contentious as in the analysis of other social institutions. This is exemplified by the controversy among Marxist educationists over the theory put forward by Bowles and Gintis in Schooling in Capitalist America²⁰ on the close correspondence between the social relations of capitalist production and the social relations of education.²¹ The controversy centres on the question of whether Bowles and Gintis have overemphasised the determining role of the economy to the neglect of the political and cultural realm.

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The debate illustrates why it is important to seek the correct formulation of the relationship. Perhaps because education is one of society's social institutions, there has been a tendency for analysis to neglect its structural determinants. Because of this I feel it is vital for me to establish at the beginning of this study the structural context of adult education practices. I conceptualise this context as the political economy of adult education, by which I mean that the nature of adult education is shaped by the distribution of political power in society, which is in turn a reflection of the economic structure. This is not to say that all aspects of adult education are in some way directly determined by economic factors but simply to assert that adult education is not an autonomous institution which generates all of its own characteristics. Its nature has its own logic but this is embedded in the larger logic of the economic structure. The analysis of the political economy of adult education rests on certain key concepts of Marxist social theory which need to be introduced at this point.

Marx and Engels developed a theory for the analysis of society as a totality which they called 'the materialist conception of history'. They derived it from a synthesis of three currents of European thought of the early nineteenth century - German philosophy, French socialist politics, and English economics. The theory was first formulated in The German Ideology and it provided the basis of their subsequent work. Engels summarised it in this way:

...that view of the course of history which seeks the ultimate cause and the great moving power of all important historic events in the economic development of society, in the changes in the mode of production and exchange, in the consequent division of society into classes, and in the struggle of these classes against one another.²³

Marx and Engels viewed any given society as a historical product undergoing a process of change. They identified the ultimate source of social change in changes in the economic structure and political conflicts between classes. A fundamental category in their social theory is the mode of production.

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The concept of the mode of production is used to differentiate periods of history according to the nature of the economy. Considered abstractly, a mode of production is a combination of the forces of production and the social relations of production. The forces of production include the means of production (such as land, raw materials, tools, machinery) and human labour (embodying knowledge, skill and attitudes). The relations of production are the social relationships people enter into in the process of production, and are defined by who owns and controls the means of production.

In concrete terms, several different modes of production can be identified historically. They are differentiated according to the way in which the products of labour are distributed within society. In the earliest mode, primitive communalism, production through hunting and gathering and basic agriculture was at a very low level, land was held communally, and products were shared among the members of society. But once the development of settled agriculture had enabled the production of a surplus beyond immediate subsistence needs, the possibility arose of a social division of labour with one class appropriating the surplus product from the class of direct producers. The way this appropriation takes place is used to define subsequent modes of production:

What distinguishes the various economic formations of society - the distinction between for example, a society based on slave-labour and a society based on wage-labour - is the form in which this surplus labour is in each case extorted from the immediate producer...²⁴

The form of appropriation is determined by ownership of the means of production and therefore the nature of the relations of production provides the key to identifying a particular mode of production.

Marx and Engels used the concept to differentiate historical epochs, regarding the different modes as stages in the evolution of higher forms of society:

In broad outlines Asiatic, ancient, feudal and modern bourgeois modes of production can be designated as progressive epochs in the economic formation of society.²⁵

It is important to note that they did not regard these stages of social evolution in a unilinear way. Although human society began with the primitive communal mode of production, its evolution globally and historically has taken several different directions from that starting point. Sometimes a mode has remained relatively static for a long period, such as the Asiatic mode in China. Sometimes external forces have extinguished a mode, as in the case of the ancient mode of the Roman Empire. One mode, feudalism in Western Europe, underwent an internal process of development from the thirteenth century, resulting eventually in the capitalist mode of production. By the late nineteenth century this mode had spread so that it made an impact on the rest of the world. During the twentieth century, it has been superseded by the socialist mode of production in several parts of the globe. The historical development of modes of production has therefore been an uneven process.

There have been the following modes: primitive communalism, a variety of pre-capitalist modes, capitalism and socialism. But although it is possible to define the historical existence of different modes of production, none of them has ever existed on its own in isolation. At any given time there may be several modes evident in a society, although one will be dominant and thus define the character of the society. The totality of varying economic relations forms the basis of the social entity which Marx called the 'social formation'. It includes a configuration of modes: 'A formation embraces both the past and the future; dying modes of production; the dominant, defining mode; and seeds of coming modes.'²⁶

Most of the work of Marx and Engels consisted of an analysis of the capitalist mode of production, which is characterised by a minority having ownership of the means of production and the majority being dependent for their subsistence on wage labour. They analysed how capitalism arose from pre-capitalist modes and drew the conclusion that it would eventually be superseded by socialism and communism, in which the means of production would be owned by society and therefore the basis of exploitation would be eliminated. Today there are two kinds of social formation, the capitalist and the socialist. But they can be considered in terms of another dimension, namely the level of development of the forces of production on a

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spectrum from advanced to underdeveloped. Hence I distinguish between advanced and underdeveloped capitalism (for example, the USA and Kenya) and between advanced and underdeveloped socialism (for example, the USSR and Mozambique). I use the term 'Third World' to refer to both kinds of underdeveloped economy.

The concept of the mode of production is central to historical materialism because it provides the means of differentiating societies according to the nature of their economy. This is of vital significance because of the role of the economy in Marxist theory:

...the economic structure of society always furnishes the real basis, starting from which we can alone work out the ultimate explanation of the whole superstructure of juridical and political institutions as well as the religious, philosophical and other ideas of a given historical period.²⁷

This concept of base and superstructure is one of some complexity and it is of great controversy within Marxism, especially over the precise extent to which economic factors determine the political and cultural levels, and the extent to which these have a reciprocal effect on the economy. It is a concept of particular importance for the Marxist analysis of adult education. The general processes which shape the individual's psychology are to be located within this framework. The specific institutional form of the shaping process, education, is one of the institutions of the superstructure.

In their metaphor of base and superstructure Marx and Engels were pointing out that the mode of production provides the foundation of political institutions and cultural processes. Their fundamental point was that these institutions and processes are not autonomous and self-created but are related to economic factors, such as the relationship between classes. In explaining the complex reality of society, the economic base provides the final clue to its nature. The base determines the form of superstructural institutions and ideas, in the sense of setting limits and exerting pressures on their development. But these institutions and ideas have a degree of autonomy and can in turn influence the economic base. Marx, for example, in

Capital. Volume 1 showed how the power of the state in England hastened the transformation of the feudal mode of production into the capitalist mode.²⁸ The metaphor therefore does not imply a crude economic reductionism, that all aspects of politics and culture can be explained directly by the state of development of the forces of production or the relations of production. The economy is not the only determining factor and there is a certain degree of reciprocal causality between the base and superstructure. However, in the final analysis the distinguishing feature of Marxist social theory is that the 'ultimate explanation' of political and cultural phenomena is to be found in the material conditions of life. This is the essential insight of the 'materialist conception of history' and the rationale for its analytical method:

Empirical observation must in each separate instance bring out empirically, and without mystification and speculation, the connection of the social and political structure with production. The social structure and the state are continually evolving out of the life-processes of definite individuals, not as they appear in their own or other people's imagination, but as they really are; i.e. as they operate, produce materially, and hence as they work under definite material limits, presuppositions and conditions independent of their will.²⁹

The Marxist approach to adult education therefore argues that it must be analysed within its economic and political context.

Within the conceptual matrix of the mode of production and base and superstructure, the idea of class has an important place. Class expresses a relationship to the means of production. Certain groups in society own the means of production, other groups do not. There are therefore different classes in different modes of production and each mode has its characteristic polarisation of antagonistic classes - for example, slave-owners and slaves in the ancient mode; landowners and serfs in feudalism. Classes also reflect the division of labour in society, in which the division between mental and manual labour is primary.

The relationship between classes is one of contradiction, involving a shifting terrain of

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domination and subordination. The ownership of economic property is a source of political power and the property-owning class constitutes the ruling class in society. But the opposed economic interests of the classes leads them into conflict. In capitalism, for example, there is a fundamental conflict over the relative size of the workers' wages and the capitalists' profits. Marx and Engels regarded this struggle between classes as a major source of social change. However, they stressed that while a class may be seen objectively to exist in society (as a 'class-in-itself') its members do not necessarily have a shared consciousness of their common interests (and therefore it may not constitute a 'class-for-itself'). It is in developing this class consciousness in the working class that socialist organisations have a role to play, creating the subjective conditions of conscious (as opposed to spontaneous) class struggle which may hasten social change in a socialist direction.

Identifying the objective existence of different classes is an important part of the Marxist method, because it can provide an understanding of the nature of the economic base of a given society (and hence provide insight into the phenomena of the superstructure). The empirical procedure of class analysis in contemporary capitalist social formations is based on distinguishing between the following classes:

The bourgeoisie (or capitalist class), whose members own means of production on a large scale (such as banks, land, factories, and businesses).

The petty-bourgeoisie (or middle-class) which contains two strata. The members of the first stratum own small-scale enterprises or employ themselves (such as shopkeepers and small producers). The members of the second stratum help to supervise and maintain the capitalist system (such as government officials, teachers, technical and management personnel in commerce and industry, and professionals).

The proletariat (or working class), whose members own no means of production and have to sell their labour for wages in order to survive. This class occupies the subordinate position in all sectors of the economy - industry, services, agriculture, etc. - in both urban and rural areas.

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The peasantry whose members possess means of agricultural production (such as land, implements, and animals) and rely primarily on their own labour and that of their family. This class can be subdivided into the strata of rich, middle, and poor peasants.

The semi-proletariat, whose members retain some means of agricultural production but who also spend a lot of time working for wages (such as many migrant workers in the Third World).

The lumpenproletariat, whose members have no means of production and engage in casual or illegal forms of employment.

Each of these classes has different economic interests, a fact which underlies conflicts which appear in political, legal and other spheres, including education. The Marxist approach thus locates adult education within the class structure of society and identifies how the different class interests influence its nature.

It is in relation to the classes in society that the concept of the state is important. Marx and Engels stressed that the state is not neutral and somehow 'above' society but rather it is a political institution through which the economically dominant class seeks to advance its own interests. They conceived the state as fundamentally an instrument of the ruling class - for example:

...the modern state, no matter what its form, is essentially a capitalist machine, the state of the capitalists, the ideal personification of the total national capital.³⁰

Thus whilst there are different forms of the state in the capitalist mode of production (ranging from dictatorships to parliamentary democracies), its basic role is to maintain the conditions for capitalist accumulation and reproduction.

Marx and Engels, and subsequently Lenin, focussed primarily on the coercive nature of the state and its 'organised violence', paying attention to the armed forces, the police, the courts and prisons, the legislature, and the bureaucracy of government officials as the agents of state power.

Adult education for socialism

However, later Marxist writers, influenced particularly by Gramsci, have also considered the state's ideological role in legitimating capitalism and in engendering willing consent to the existing social order. For example, Althusser in an important essay distinguishes between 'repressive' and 'ideological' state apparatuses, identifying education as the most important of the ideological state apparatuses.³¹ Furthermore, recent Marxist debates on the nature of the state have indicated that the state cannot be conceived simplistically as the tool of the ruling class. As with other institutions of the superstructure, the state is a terrain on which class struggle takes place, so that ruling class control has to be continually defended and renewed in the face of contradictions and resistance, especially in the ideological apparatuses. This concept of the state as both a medium of class domination and a site of class struggle is highly significant for the study of adult education because of the increasingly central role of the state in its provision.

The final concept of historical materialism for consideration is that of imperialism. Marx and Engels showed how capitalism had developed a world market and they began to identify the tendency to monopoly in capitalism, with smaller enterprises being conglomerated into larger ones. In a major theoretical advance, Lenin analysed how the development of monopoly capitalism in the later nineteenth century resulted in the export of capital to economies outside Europe and the USA:

As long as capitalism remains what it is, surplus capital will be utilised not for the purpose of raising the standard of living of the masses in a given country, for this would mean a decline in profits for the capitalists, but for the purpose of increasing profits by exporting capital abroad to the backward countries. In these backward countries profits are usually high, for capital is scarce, the price of land is relatively low, wages are low, raw materials are cheap.³²

Lenin called this economic process of capitalist accumulation in a world market 'imperialism'. It was accompanied by the imposition of political power by the capitalist nations so that they could guarantee geographical areas against competition