

## **Education and Social Control: A Study in Progressive Primary Education.**

*Education and Social Control: A Study in Progressive Primary Education.* By Rachel Sharp and Anthony Green, with the assistance of Jacqueline Lewis. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975. Pp. xi, 256.

*Education and Social Control* is significant not so much for the content of the research which occupies the text, but because of the questions the authors pose precisely as a consequence of the perspective employed in that research. They ask whether the subjective orientation of sociological phenomenology, with its social psychological emphasis is really concerned with a sociological "problematic" (p. 16), and whether the narrow view captured by the consciousness of social actors offers a sufficient explainer for social processes. In that regard the book is a model of honest and open social science. Rachel Sharp, Anthony Green and Jacqueline Lewis demonstrate that forthright scholarship and research require the questioning and eventual overturning of cherished perspectives in the face of proof demonstrating the explanatory impoverishment of the older view. So, in addition to criticizing any slavish and ideological reliance on functionalist or conflict (a subset of structural functionalism) or social pathology models in the face of contrary structural evidence (e.g., class struggle), the authors admit, as well, the inadequacy of a recent "radical" model in mainstream sociology, what they term sociological phenomenology.

Sociological phenomenology, like ethnomethodology and their common ancestor, symbolic interactionism, is organized around market analogies transformed into reified explainers of "everyday life" (see, for example, my article, "The Situational Sociologies: A Theoretical Note"; *The Insurgent Sociologist*, vol. V, no. IV, Summer, 1975). The fetishization of "structureless" and a close focus upon "daily life", including the reified acceptance of its "deleted" or distorted class content, represent both the entrepreneurial and "radical" mark of sociological phenomenology's rise as a supposed counter to presumed normative perspectives like structural functionalism. Sharp, Green and Lewis express this understanding in their preface and in chapters one and two ("Sociology and the Classroom" and "Theoretical Considerations"). Indeed, they have pointed out that sociological phenomenology, far from becoming a radical alternative to structural functionalism, "is rapidly emerging from the crisis in the sociology of education as the new orthodoxy" (p. 15). This conclusion adds to (and is anticipated by) the important work of Scott McNall and James C. M. Johnson in "The New Conservatives: Ethnomethodologists, Phenomenologists and Symbolic Interactionists"; *The Insurgent Sociologist*, vol. V, no. IV (Summer, 1975).

This crisis in the sociology of education is, of course, only a partial reflection of the general social crisis of capitalism which results in bourgeois epistemologies' constant oscillation between objective and subjective idealisms, both being inadequate explanatory bases. For sociological phenomenology, a variant of subjective idealism, the objects of knowledge are the subjective states of the actors. Consequently, the reifications used by the social actors to explain their own social conditions are taken to be exhaustive records of social reality. Unless the researcher "goes behind" these subjective conceptions, a structural analysis cannot be made. In chapter two, "Theoretical Considerations", Sharp, Green and Lewis rightly suggest that the explanation of appearances by themselves only leaves one rooted in apparition. They refute such revivals of Bishop Berkeley when they say that "[t]he basic preoccupation of the sociological phenomenologists is thus with the subtle texture of meaning which constitutes social reality. The essential idealism of the perspective becomes apparent given the focus on the knowing subject's construction of the 'external world'. Indeed, the 'external social' world is mere subjective construction of the 'constituting consciousness' "(pp. 20-21).

Having recognized the denouement of structural functionalism and the insufficiency of sociological phenomenology, Sharp, Green and Lewis, as serious social scientists, find themselves compelled to look beyond the false antipodes of these two perspectives *within* the realm of bourgeois sociology. They are forced by both their questions and their data to turn to Karl Marx. This openness to science and the accompanying willingness to overthrow false paradigms is the most refreshing aspect of *Education and Social Control*. Apparently, like many scholars in sociology, they are just coming to Marx and, although they note that the material base of society is of major importance in analyzing social structure, they are still undeveloped in this area. Therefore, they ironically reproduce a residue of agnosticism by asserting that the "Failure of Marxists to provide a satisfactory analysis of the development of capitalist society since Marx needs to be explained perhaps not in terms of the falsity of Marx's insights but in terms of the failure to move beyond him to develop new categories able to grasp the great complexity

of capitalist social formations'' (p. 237; my italics). This springs from the authors' misunderstanding of the analytic, nominal, operational, real and heuristic character of the Marxist categories; 'modes of production', 'forces of production', and 'relations of production'. Sharp, Green and Lewis have assigned these categories an arbitrary and ambiguous status, in contradiction to their precise use by Marx in *Capital*.

Although Sharp, Green and Lewis make an important contribution in discussing the implicit natural-law basis of child centred schooling ideologies and their use as strategies for "blaming the victim", I don't find those points to be salient features of the book. Therefore, I have purposely chosen in this review not to discuss the mass of descriptive data and analyses made within the framework of sociological phenomenology at Mapledene Lane, the particular English primary school under study. The reasons, I think, have been made rather clear.

*Education and Social Control* is a model for viewing the historical development of paradigms and the structural reasons why paradigm violating issues emerge or are finally recognized by otherwise mainstream scholars. As part of the general breakdown of capitalist epistemologies and social theory, *Education and Social Control* marks both the resolution of inappropriate and narrow questions of consciousness severed from their material base and the asking of other, more necessary ones such as; what is the significance of capitalist production relations for sociological explanation?

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