

## BOOK REVIEWS

Gonzalez, Gilbert G., *Progressive Education: A Marxist Interpretation*. Minneapolis: Marxist Educational Press, 1982. 199 pp. \$8.75(U.S.).

Over the past few years, the Marxist Educational Press, centered at the University of Minnesota, has gained a slowly growing reputation for publishing a series of volumes aimed at bringing a certain style of Marxist scholarship to a wider audience. *Progressive Education: A Marxist Interpretation* is part of this larger effort.

A large portion of the volume is taken up both with laying out the outline of a Marxist approach to the study of schooling and to analyzing the relationship between the social and educational beliefs of a wide group of historical figures and the ideological "functions" their positions perform. Among the individuals dealt with are Locke, Rousseau and Adam Smith, with the twentieth century being represented by Ross, Riis, Dewey, Thorndike, and others. The major argument is that all of these figures contributed to legitimating the control of labor by capital. The ultimate effect of their work was merely to provide ideological support and justification for capitalism in ascendancy. The volume's attention then turns to an ideological and political economic analysis of testing and the relationship between labor force needs and education.

The reader may have noticed that I have stressed one word in the first sentence of the previous paragraph, the word "a". For it should be made clear that while some sections of *Progressive Education* are certainly interesting, the kind of Marxist analysis represented by Gonzalez's work is but one limited example of many others. In fact, it would not necessarily be accepted as adequate by many people on the left, in large part because of a somewhat mechanistic logic that tends to weave its way through the arguments Gonzalez presents.

Gonzalez's position is a variant of what has been called correspondence theories. The most well known of these has been, of course, that articulated by Bowles and Gintis in *Schooling in Capitalist America*. What sets Gonzalez apart from Bowles and Gintis's position (which they themselves have now rigorously criticized and have largely rejected as not being sophisticated enough in its treatment of "contradictory tendencies" and the actual dynamics of the state, culture, and so on) is his insistence that, in essence, they were not guided enough by correspondence principles. They did not make the distinction between the "monopoly" and "nonmonopoly" stages of capitalism and, hence, did not see the "real" correspondences between what schools did and the growth of our political economy.

Underlying this theory is an overly functionalist orientation, one which sees all of schooling as merely a subset of the state (which it largely is) and all of the state as merely a subset of the economy (which it may not always be). It is here where some real problems may lie in the analysis, for the volume neglects a huge amount of excellent theoretically and politically informed Marxist literature on the role of the state in our social formation, as well as having an underdeveloped theory of culture.

For example, as Offe, Poulantzas, Skocpol, Gintis, and others have recently argued, the state (and therefore some important aspects of existing educational policies and practices) is a site of conflict, not only a tool of dominant groups. It is not merely an arm of capital, though this is sometimes implied by Gonzalez. Nor is it a foregone conclusion that the state only supports "the" dominant class, especially since there are conflicts within that class as well as between that class and fractions of other classes found within the state as well. To ignore this reality is to run the risk of a peculiarly static logic, one which is actually inherently less "Marxist" than it could be.

Unfortunately, this relatively static appraisal occurs elsewhere as well. For instance, while uncovering some important ideological positions taken by the Progressives, Gonzalez makes it appear that educational policy is the result of elite imposition. This is and has been quite often not the case. Like the state, educational policy has historically often been the result of class, race, and gender *conflict*. Working class and oppressed groups have not been passive in the face of this. In fact, as a number of historians have recently documented, educational policies in practice have not just served the interests of dominant groups, but have quite often resulted from constant struggle over them at a local level. In fact, the struggle over educational policies and practices many times helped, say, working class groups to form a more coherent class and race politics. Yet this sense of lived history is mostly missing in *Progressive Education*, perhaps because Gonzalez has chosen to emphasize the spokespersons of a particular social and intellectual movement, rather than the lived action of real groups of people at the time.

The aforementioned arguments about passive models and lived cultures points out a final weakness in Gonzalez's book. By seeing schools as being the agents of monopoly capital, agents that fundamentally shape the consciousness of their students so that these students fit unerringly into the appropriate slots in the social, racial, and sexual division of labor, one can do no more than assume successful socialization to the ideology of capital. Students totally accept it. Ideological reproduction is a closed circle. Yet, this is simply wrong. Working class and other students in the past and now often resist, mediate, and transform the ideological messages of the school based on the strengths of their own lived class, race, and gender cultures, just as their parents have historically done in their workplaces.

While I have criticized this book for a number of conceptual and political reasons, this is not to say that it is not valuable in other ways. Exactly the opposite is the case, in fact. The most valuable section, however, is actually not found in the volume proper, but is added as an appendix. This is Gonzalez's interesting political and ideological case study of the history of educational reform in Los Angeles and its effects on the Chicano community. Nor can one doubt Gonzalez's very real political commitment or his evident — and correct — passion in caring for oppressed people. Furthermore, the volume, like the series in general, needs to be supported if only because of the politics of knowledge distribution in our society. Alternative social criticisms from the left are rarer than they should be and any consistent, self-critical, and rigorous attempt to engage in it deserves our attention.

With this said, though, certain problems limit the book's usefulness. There is no notion of the relative autonomy of the state or culture. Given the book's political commitments it is also oddly undialectical. As I noted, class, race and gender actors seem passive, as if there was no response by any of these groups to what was happening. And, finally, it is somewhat limited by its specific brand of Marxism which seems to ignore the immense progress made by other Marxists in the last decades in our understanding of the complex relationships among education, class, culture, and economy.

Michael W. Apple  
University of Wisconsin, Madison

Gillett, Margaret. *We Walked Very Warily: A History of Women at McGill*. Montreal: Eden Press, 1981. 496 pp. \$18.95.

In recent years the history of Canadian education has been substantially rewritten. The familiar, and frequently deadly dull, chronicle of democracy's steady advance within the little red schoolhouse and its successors is giving way to a complex portrait of class, regional, ethnic and sexual variation. Margaret Gillett's *We Walked Very Warily. A History of Women at McGill* (Montreal: Education Press Women's Publications, 1981) contributes to this revision by setting out the uncertain process by which one major Canadian university accepted women. Covering more than a hundred years from the mid-19th century to the 1970s it describes how women gained access to and shared, most often incompletely, in the promise of undergraduate, graduate and professional education.

The Introduction titled "What Would You Have a Woman Know?" is especially useful. In its breadth of coverage it seems designed to become the standard point of departure for undergraduate discussion of female university education. We are introduced to the ways in which the cultural definition of women — most particularly the genteel ideal — set the terms for female education. Advocates of the 'lady' favored a body of knowledge restricted by conventional notions of what was proper. Unrestrained intellectual inquiry was not for women. The persistence of this sentiment consigned girls and women, at McGill as elsewhere, to a relatively narrow range of scholarship. Gillett goes on to illustrate how female students and faculty slowly, often courageously, came to find a place at McGill.

The Introduction does, however, reveal two difficulties which bedevil the remainder of the volume as well. If ideas about the lady were prevalent and powerful cross Europe and North America, it is arguable that there was a substantial difference in their articulation, for instance, at the University of Cambridge and Oberlin College. The scholarly tradition like the much less democratic membership of British universities can be distinguished from the more utilitarian and popular orientation of American state and even private institutions of higher learning. University training in England, like one suspects France and Germany, admitted women to a restricted class-defined meritocracy. In contrast, the United States to a much greater degree, and certainly by the 20th century, largely rejected the appeal of a clerisy. Such differences had implications for women's experience of university life and its aftermath. They need greater attention if we are to understand McGill, an institution which combined, at one time or another, inspiration from a variety of sources. The concept of the lady sustains an