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### **The Right to Education**

The right to Education is a fundamental human right, inseparable from people's aspirations to a full and a wholly authentic democracy.

This is why the distinction proposed between the analysis of this right by the so-called human rights approach and the one proposed by the economic development is itself an aberration. This dissociation between the demands of the progress of human rights and those of economic development results from the reduction of the latter to the expansion of the markets, which are themselves subjugated to the demands of profitable accumulation of capital. This reduction is a consequence of the limited definition of the object of study of conventional ("vulgar") economics. In a critical perspective on the real existing world (a world governed by capitalism) the only possible definition of development must be holistic and associate, and not dissociate economic progress (the amelioration of the productivity of social work) to the progress of society and individuals, in the access to and the effective exercise of all individual and collective rights, and in all domains of social existence, including of course the right to education.

A second reflection of the method calls for a principal option in favor of the philosophical idealism of many advocates of the right to education. The implementation of systematic politics of education that aim to ensuring gradually the greatest equality in real access to education for all, like the ones which propose to deliberately support the emancipation of individuals and societies by developing their critical capacities, thus allowing them to become active subjects in the transformation of the world, constitutes important means in the service of emancipation and progress. But they do not constitute the decisive means to reach this result. The transformation of the social relation which is decisive for the production of wealth and the distribution of means of access to it, assume an even more decisive importance. Without this, the best possible education, the most equal and the most generous would never be allowed to decimate the destructive effects of the social stratification produced by the mode of production and the distribution of wealth. The idea that a system of education of an appropriate and suitable quality could by itself transform the world is a naïve idea. The famous sentence cited in epigraph at the creation of UNESCO in 1945 ("War is born in the minds of people") is wrong: war is the product of conflicts due to access to resources and wealth. Discourses and theories come after to give it an appearance of legitimacy.

A third point deserves without any doubt to be recalled here. So-called scientific theories have been formulated with the intention- consciously or not- to legitimize inequality between people and individuals. But if racism which stratifies people according to pretended inequalities in their creative capacities is no longer respected (since not so long ago), the prejudice of inequalities "from birth" of human capacities is far from being eradicated. Perhaps, a little minority of human beings exist (one or two percent) who have exceptional capacities, just as there are a similar small amount who have real deficiencies. But the huge majority (at least 90%) has a comparable degree of intelligence and sensitivity, themselves diverse in their forms of expression, of which the blooming or suffocation depends widely on how education is implemented. The hierarchical classification of forms of intelligence is itself far from being eradicated.

I do not ignore the important role that an appropriate education policy could play in the transformation of the world, given that education is not considered just as a means of reproduction of society, to which education should adjust, but instead as a means, among others, to struggle for the transformation of society. Social struggles, considered in all their dimensions, could have as an

objective to use education as one of their means to advance beyond the system, for its transformation. That would be achieved when those struggles are able to impose two objectives on education policies of utmost importance: (1) to insure real equality in access for all to the same quality of education at all levels; (2) to give in the content of this education the objective of emancipating human beings, by arming them with a true critical capacity. We will measure the quality of the education system by the measurement- as precise as possible- of the responses to these challenges.

### **True equality in access to a quality education**

The option in favor of this objective has never been incorporated into the political systems of our society, those of the real existing capitalism. Most often, we substitute true equality- at best- with the discourse of “equal opportunity”, in ignoring (or pretending to ignore) that the latter lost its relevance from the moment that the society is built on the one of the multiple forms of the distinction between the owning classes and in that way dominating classes (in our days the bourgeoisie in the large sense of the term) and the popular classes that are dominated and their work exploited .

The unchanging United States model is in itself built on the fundamental recognition not only of the legitimacy of inequality, but even more so over the social utility pretended by this one. The reward of inequality will be, in the United States ideology, the only effective way capable of promoting the inventive initiative and through it, progress. The theme of competition, which is supposed to direct relations between individuals, is substituted for solidarity, which carries with it the capacity to promote change and progress - which is denied. It consists only of an ideology, in a functional sense, and flat in the meaning: The legitimization of the power of the dominant class. But this ideology (that I have named “Liberal Virus”- title of one of my book) is dominant. The ideology of the dominant class is the dominant ideology of the society in question.

In this framework the rights and the practices concerning the access to education in the United States are not based on equal rights in education, but only on the right to “an” education, which means in fact an education of minimal quality and less than mediocre for the majority, and not only for the groups designated as “minorities” of the disadvantaged (such as blacks, women or others). Education is supplied a la carte according to financial means that are available to individuals or communities responsible of financing and managing primary schools, high schools and universities.

John Rawls defines, in this framework, the United States concept of social justice. There is justice once the system, in spite of its production and reproduction of inequalities, allows everyone to get some benefit from its development. The underprivileged, if they get a minimal benefit through a “trickle down” effect, should not complain. Once again, this is only the humanitarian version of the ideology of the legitimacy of inequality.

A society founded on such principles does certainly not deserve the qualification of democracy in which it is draped. It is a society which is by definition anti-democratic.

However the history of the struggles of democratization in education, understood as the promotion of systematic means intended to reinforce the possibilities of reduction of inequalities, was not always missing. The example of France, perfectly analyzed by Bruno Garnier, testifies to this. “The single school”, and in addition of good quality (in the way that its programs take into consideration the objective of emancipation of human beings), proposed after the World War 1 as a means to reach beyond horizons offered by the secular, free and compulsory school introduced by Jules Ferry, implemented partially after World War II (the Council of the Resistance adopted the positions of Langevin-Wallon’s principle, inspired by the communist party) had led to some results in the

direction of a reduced inequality, offering real and better possibilities for social mobility. Associated with a moment of accelerated development (within capitalism – the “30 glorious years” of 1945 to 1975), these educative ways have been relatively effective. The pessimists, like Bourdieu, have nevertheless demonstrated the limits of narrowness, not without convincing arguments.

We could multiply the number of examples and show how, from 1945 to 1975/1980, real progress-unequal admittedly, as always in history- have been accomplished in the majority of the countries of the world. We could not dissociate this progress, neither here from the social and political struggles of the popular classes nor there from the struggles for the reconquest of the independence of colonized peoples.

But we have to admit that the movement has been inversed everywhere- in spite of resistances here and there that have slowed down its deployment – with the triumph of the ideology of the “liberal virus” during the two latest decades of the 20th century. The coincidence between the advance of this reactionary ideology and the breakdown of the socialist system as an existing reality is not random. Since those revolutions made in the name of socialism, regardless of their evolution, erosion and ulterior drifts, have initiated a concept and a practice of one single school equal for all, ensuring by this a social mobility towards the top unparalleled in history. Thus this is not at random if the Wallon project was inspired by the “New Russia”, an effort pursued by France and its militants of “The school and the Nation”. But the fashion today is to denigrate all of the existing achievements inherent to these socialisms..

This regression of democracy – in spite of rhetorical efforts to present this as an “advance” ! – is manifested by the opinion in favor of a developmental approach at the expense of an approach based on rights, and the transfer which is associated with the responsibility of “thinking education” from UNESCO to the World Bank!

This era –the three last decades – is that of the rolling back of democracy and of the ideal of equality that cannot be dissociated. This is characterized by the adoption of the underlying principles of the United States model (always the “Liberal Virus”). Associated with other forms of the decline of democracy (for which I return to what I have written elsewhere notably in the “*The Liberal Virus*”), the politics at work in the domain of education participate in what I have unhesitatingly qualified as the “democratic farce”. Of course, we find the expression of the regression of democracy in the definition of educational objectives, which I address in the following.

### **The objectives of education and the question of emancipation**

The reactionary offensive comes naturally with the reappearance of overused terms of the inequality of individuals “at birth”. But moreover from an adoption of an unilateral definition of the objective of education: produce humans “instrumental” for the functioning of the system, which is advantageous for the profitable accumulation of capital.

This objective then associates the transmission of instrumental knowledge with the formatting of appropriate behavior.

This instrumental knowledge is itself differentiated and stratified according to the place that will be given to the adult in training and conceived to fix her/him definitively for all her/his life at the level requested by the hierarchy. We speak highly of continuing education, which the rapidity of the transformation of productive systems imposes from now on. But this training is not designed to favor social mobility towards the top, with a few unusual exceptions. Additional knowledge and perhaps

new knowledge, is necessary to simply retain their place in the hierarchy. This continuing education is conceived, at its best, to reduce the disaster of lost usefulness (and employment), to slow down the social mobility towards a lower level ( marginalization) , but no more than that.

In its other dimension, “useful” education formats behaviors of submission. This formatting can take the extreme forms of blind obedience (Japan practices more this school model than others). But more subtly, it can promote the “useful” behavior to format non-citizens, who are passive, spectators and consumers. The ideologico-para cultural themes of “live in the present”, forget the past and let the future happen by itself, are also the effective means of this formatting that suffocates critical thinking and thus the faculties of inventiveness of the critical utopia and creativity.

This contemporary dominating discourse concerning this “useful” education, put in the exclusive service of the reproduction of the system, proposes then a measure of excellence founded on this double adaptation of the school child, the high school student, the college student, the worker during his training in the immediate demands called for by economic progress.

Obviously excellence is here synonymous with the achievement of excellence in disaster! The most extreme example of this coincidence between excellence and disaster is provided by the teaching of conventional economics. It is not coincidental because “economics” (the new name introduced by Alfred Marshall in 1881), was produced in response to Marx, who wrote “A Critique of Political Economy” (under title of *Capital*) focused on the ideological function of the “discourse of the bourgeoisie on its own practices”(legitimized this practice by presenting it as rational, promoting progress and beneficial for all) and on the merchant alienation that constituted its basis. The abandonment of that critical approach to reality substitutes with it the construction of an “imaginary economy” (“the economy of the generalized markets”). This economy that I deemed imaginary, and the only one from now on taught in universities, grounded on the United States model, proposes to demonstrate that the markets have a tendency to produce an equilibrium which in addition is optimal. Yet the only effort to rigorously demonstrate this proposition – the one of Walras in answer to Marx – had failed. We must therefore accept, like Marx, that capitalism really moves from instability to instability, in accordance with the struggles and conflicts, without ever reaching an equilibrium. The theory of capitalism is then not separable from its history. The distance which separates the discourse of the imaginary economy from existing capitalist markets is at least as large as the one that separates the discourse of socialism from the reality of concerned societies. By taking the objective of building the theory of an object that does not exist, conventional economics becomes then analogous to the scholasticism of the middle ages, that was preoccupied with “the gender of angels”. Should we be astonished that none of the Nobel prizes in economy – all awarded exclusively to acrobats of that question – did not anticipate what so ever of the recent events, for example the financial crises of 2008, visible years before its explosion by others, the non-conventional economists, which means the ones who are not recognized by the criteria of excellence of the concerned education!

In counterpoint then of the objective of “instrumental” education, we suggest the objective of the contribution of education to the formation of active/productive citizens who are capable of creative imagination. The objective of education is then to contribute to the emancipation of human beings, in their quality as both individuals, and men and women in solidarity within a universalist perspective. Of course that objective does not exclude, but integrates, the transmission of general and specialized knowledge; but it excludes the formatting of behaviors.

This objective has certainly not always been integrally ignored in the history of the struggles for educational reform, even though in fact the weight of social reality and of its demands of reproduction

of inequality have always limited its implementation. Nevertheless, in this domain as in the one that concerns equality in the access to education, our era is the one of regression of democracy and along with it aspirations of emancipation.

It goes without saying that the formulation of programs, means of pedagogy and legislation capable of performing in the required way an education in the service of the emancipation remains difficult and complex and cannot be produced magically in a formula of ready to wear. This can be only the product of a permanent dialectic associating reflection, debate and practice. In that way this definition of criteria of excellence is much more complicated than it is for those who have adopted the principle of submission of education to the demands of the dominant capital. One should do with that difficulty.

### **Realities and myths concerning the “multi culturalism”**

The cultural diversity, whatever the definition is, is old as the world, the same as intercultural exchanges, but also the conflicts operating in these domains, the evolutions and the assimilations. The contemporary blowout of discourse on these terms is, at least in part, the product of a recent intensification of migrations of citizens of previously colonized countries of the South towards the metropolis of the North. These movements of migrants from “non-Europeans / non-Christians” origin participate naturally in the renewal of eurocentrist prejudices - more or less racists – that have molded the dominant culture in Europe and in United States in 19<sup>TH</sup> century. It consists here only of trivial evidences. The recall that the expected behavior of democrats should understand that diversity, and – beyond “tolerate” (a term that I do not like because we “tolerate the one we do not like”- her/his mother in law for example) it- to respect its demands, is by itself trivial.

Can we, from these reflections, make “multiculturalism” the objective of the reconstruction of a world founded on the affirmation of the primary originality of identities and of the belonging of human beings to distinct cultural communities?

I do not think so, and I will pretend that culturalism is a political strategy of capital, hostile to the emancipation of human beings and societies. The dominant culture in the contemporary world is not, as we say too easily, the “western/European” culture (often adding “Christian”). The fundamental values on which that dominant culture is founded are values produced by the generalized mercantile alienation peculiar to this system, and in no way the values inherited from pre-modern Europe. In reality new values of capitalism have been the product of a rupture of Europe with its own past. The fact that Europeans constructed a mythology which pretended that the modernity in question has been the product of the specificity of their “cultural invariants” inherited, either from the Greco-Roman ancestor, reinvented to that effect, or by Christianity, or even of their genetic superiority, constituted another story, for which I have proposed a critical deconstruction in *Modernity, Religion, Democracy ; Criticism of the Eurocentrism and Culturalisms*.

This very capitalist culture is now dominant on a world scale, as much in societies in the peripheries of the system as in those at its center. But this wears different clothing, producing a simulacrum of the historical continuity

In every cases the *moneytheism* in which I resume the fundamental character of the capitalist culture, maybe associated without difficulty with the most diverse culturalist forms. The culturalism to which I refer to here is a whole heteroclite of ways of thought of history that refers to cores “of invariants”, pretended to be trans-historical, that would characterize each of the defined cultures in that way. The Eurocentric culturalism and the culturalisms of the contemporary third world countries constitute the back and the face of the same medal. In the regions in which cultural diversity is defined in this way,

tags of pretended specific identities, para-religious more than truly religious (the religion here is not the one with personal conviction but like a social ritualistic constraint ) or para-ethnic are exhibited with ostentation, without compromising the submission to the demands “of the market” and to vulgar consumption. Oulemas and mullahs, popes and bishops, the Dalai Lama and monks, Brahmins, disguised as so-called spiritual authorities, legitimize their reactionary positions against the social struggle and emancipator policies.

Culturalism constitutes the ideological basis of the political practice of communitarianism. Belonging to a “community” - by inheritance – becomes then quasi-obligatory, at the expense of right to become similar as a result of equal citizenship, denied by the right to be different. Of course the communities in question are always organized in a hierarchical pyramid of which *apartheid* constituted the caricatured extreme model, but that we find again in the United States, the accomplished model of “consensual” submission to the domination of capital, expressing a perfect complementarity between *moneytheism* and monotheist religiosity. This model is from now on proposed as the solution to questions of cultural diversity in Europe. Culturalism is then a political strategy deployed systematically by the dominant power, which allows forms of efficient management of diversity for the deployment of the accumulation of monopolies.

In counterpoint of the dominant culture of the contemporary world – that of capitalism associated to diverse culturalist expressions – the production of a new culture, that of the socialism to come, considered as a more advanced phase of human civilization, rests on the active acknowledgment of diversity, but of another kind of diversity, looking toward the future to build, and therefore allowing strategies of organization and struggles to move further in that direction. In that framework as a matter of course the inherited diversities (religious, national and others), but radically transformed, find their place.

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