CHAPTER 4

A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE ON ILLITERACY

A View From the Left

It is clear that the political right has been highly successful in responding to the crisis in liberal welfare state doctrine and policies engendered by the continuing economic difficulties of the 1970's and 1980's. However, a response to the crisis of liberal views and approaches has also arisen on the political left, beginning in the late 1960's and continuing to the present day. One minor but significant aspect of this has been the emergence of a critical perspective on illiteracy. We will now explore the background to this, and outline the perspective as it has developed in Canada.

Radicalization

As was noted above, the unemployment and poverty which persisted during what was otherwise a period of economic growth during the 1960's stimulated political and social discontent. The period was a watershed in the recent history of the Canadian left, most dramatically represented in the anti-poverty movement, the student movement and the popular mobilization against the Viet Nam War. It was in part the fear that this discontent would 'Impel radical middle class youth, the poor and groups like the Québécois and Native Indians to more fundamental, i.e. revolutionary, solutions that led the federal government to institute new social programs, including the Canada Manpower Training Program. [1] However, while the new programs succeeded in incorporating many actually and potentially dissident groups and individuals into the liberal mainstream, [2] leftist ideas and initiatives continued to play a significant role in struggles both within the new government programs, as evidenced in the stormy history of the Company of Young Canadians, [3] and outside them, as exemplified in the Nova Scotia fishermad's strike of 1971 [4] and the Quebec General Strike of 1972.[5]

This activity on the left had an impact on literacy work as well. By the early 1970's, the development of the Canada Manpower Training Program had more or less by itself created a large new professional group of adult basic educators, [6] many of whom had received their political formation in the period of the 1960's and were sensitized to the facts of poverty and social injustice. As well, modifications that were introduced in the early 1970's in the educational environment of the Manpower

programs to make them more effective as anti-poverty strategies, e.g. the breaking down of authoritarian student teacher relationships, had the effect of putting instructors closer in touch with the economic and social problems faced by their students ,and no doubt contributed to the radicalization of some of them. [7]

When the writings of Paula Friere became generally available in the early 19701s, they were eagerly received by these and other Canadian adult basic educators who chafed at the limitations of methods and approaches based on the liberal perspective. Freire forged a crucial new link for many adult educators between leftist beliefs and educational practice. There followed a "honeymoon" period, in which there developed a veritable "cult" around the Brazillian born literacy educator and his radical pedagogy. [8] Many attempts were made to mechanically apply his ideas and methods without sufficient regard for the significant differences in context between Canada and the 3rd World areas he wrote about. However, after much of the fad aspect had died away, some progressive adult basic educators began to make use of Freire's ideas and examples in creative ways which showed due regard for the need to "reinvent" them in the Canadian context.[9] Since that time, a perspective on illiteracy has been emerging in Canada which reflects their thoughts and experiences, as inspired by Freire but not limited to his example. We can term. it the critical perspective, after his concept of "critical consciousness", an idea with roots in socialist and Marxist thought.

Synthesis

As yet there is no definitive, comprehensive statement of this emerging critical perspective in Canada. However, a tentative synthesis is presented here which is, as any interpretation of so, diverse and fragmentary a body of controversial opinion must be, a biased one. In this case, the bias is toward contributions by those who have considered the larger political economic implications of adult literacy education as opposed to those who primarily dwell on the philosophical and humanistic assumptions of Freire's writings. This does not imply a rejection of the latter here, just a belief that when these assumptions are divorced from a rigourous analysis of the political economic context, their meaning is often ambiguous and can be shaped to fit politically reformist or even conservative conclusions.

Furthermore, I have especially relied on the contributions of those who adhere to a socialist or Marxist orientation, both because I believe that such an orientation provides the most- adequate alternative to the liberal and conservative perspectives, but also because I believe that it accords with the revolutionary socialist stance which has become increasingly explicit in Freire's later writings. [10]

Finally, with the exception of Freire, I have only made reference to the views and approaches of those working in Canada. I believe that there is a sufficiently large and growing critical literature on adult literacy and basic education in this country to warrant this narrow focus.

A Critical Perspective

As we have seen, both the liberal and conservative perspectives see deficiencies and shortcomings of the poor as a primary cause of poverty and unemployment. According to this "deficiency model", labor markets and the economy in Canada distribute success and failure more or less 'fairly' based on effort, abilities and qualifications. Therefore, the difficulties experienced by individuals in achieving adequate employment and income can in large measure be attributed to their personal shortcomings, which in the view of liberals mainly consist of lack of basic education, life skills and job skills ("human capital"), and in the view of orthodox conservatives consist of more fundamental deficiencies which cannot be easily or efficiently corrected, if at all.

In contrast, the critical perspective rejects the personal deficiency model. Its adherents share the view that the Canadian economy and its labor market are far from fair, and that in fact they constitute the primary source of poverty and unemployment. In effect, a new explanatory variable--i.e. the capitalist economic structure--is introduced into the discussion of illiteracy and poverty. For example, Canadian adult literacy specialist Anthony R. Berezowecki argues:

> Much attention is given to the characteristics and deficiencies of the disadvantaged themselves .... Little or no consideration, on the other hand, seems to be given to what effect the operation of the existing Canadian socio-economic system has on the disadvantaged....far greater attention must be paid to the hypothesis that the existence of such a large number of economically disadvantaged people in a rich country like Canada is the direct or indirect result of the present socio-economic system.[11]

Paul Belanger of the Institute Canadien d'Education des Adultes in Montreal suggests that the Canadian economy is based on what he terms a "structure of inequality". On one hand, there are adults with opportunities to pursue their academic and occupational goals. On the other hand there are those adults who inhabit a "socio-economic desert". [12] For example, Berezowecki cites statistics which show that the national income share of the latter group actually shrank between 1965 and 1971. The top 20% of income earners increased their share of the total income 'pie' in Canada from 45.% to 48.5%, while the bottom 20% of income earners lost part of their already meagre share, dropping from 3.7% to 2.9%. [13]

Reflection

Belanger recognizes that there is indeed a high correlation between illiteracy and poverty, but he questions the interpretation put forward by the liberal perspective, i.e. that it is a causal association:

> A high proportion of illiterates was...revealed in many ... reports on poverty and social inequality.... It was felt that, if there was

> unemployment, it was because the workers lacked the necessary skills. Hard-core poverty was attributed ... to poor social integration and the absence of channels of communication with society as a whole. The answer was clear: massive literacy and occupational programs.... But are education and training the answer? [14]

He argues that illiteracy does not cause inequality; rather, it reflects it, and to some degree helps to reinforce it. He says, "cultural handicaps reflect, rather than produce, structures of inequality,"[15] and "...illiteracy is not a causal factor, but rather, a symptom of a more deep-seated problem: that of maintaining the structures of inequality.,[16] For this reason, Belanger is critical of the liberal remediation strategy:

> If we try to change attitudes of the disadvantaged without developing a full employment plan or modifying social(class) relationships, are we not guilty of a serious affront to people ... imprisoned in our urban ghettoes and rural slums? ... Of course action at the cultural level is still required, but it can never be isolated from the harsh reality of social class relationships.[17]

Similarly, Berezowecki is pessimistic about the prospects of' an educational strategy in reducing inequality:

> We must therefore ask if the gap separating the rich from the poor can be narrowed or closed. Can education help in this levelling process? Can it provide suitable employment and a decent income for all--including those who are now poor? Available evidence indicates that this will not be possible as long as present conditions prevail.[18]

In this light, Belanger analyzes what he sees as the failure of the Canada Manpower Training Program as an anti-poverty strategy. He suggests that the provision of academic upgrading and Job training, even as supplemented by innovations like human relations techniques, life skills training and individualized learning, cannot compensate for the nature of the society outside the classroom. Although in his view these are positive and desirable developments, he believes they cannot:

> counterbalance the inequality caused by factors like the social (class) position of the participants & their poor living conditions, the national employment structure....[19]

For similar reasons, Serge Wagner, director of a. community-based literacy program in Montreal, "Crossroad", is pessimistic about the potential of literacy training as a strategy for alleviating the poverty in the Point St. Charles area:

> In offering them literacy training we were not suggesting that they change places in the social structure: we were, rather, telling them to become better established in their position, since, even on an academic level alphabetization leads to a dead end: for those adults who do become literate, the school train will never lead to the university station. Literacy is not a tool for social mobility (even individual mobility). At the very most it enables lame ducks to catch the fourth class coach.[20]

Through their work the Crossroads team came to believe that:

> The true causes of illiteracy had to be understood, and this reality had to be viewed from the much larger context of poverty and exploitation.[21]

Let us now turn to an examination of this larger context, the capitalist economic structure, as it is conceived of by adherents of the critical perspective.

Economic Structure

Relying on what is essentially a Marxist analysis, adherents of the critical perspective locate the source of the maldistribution of wealth and power in a capitalist society like Canada in the economic structure through which the production of goods and services is carried on. Freire explains its nature:

> In a capitalist perspective the various factors in production--means of production on the one hand, workers on the other--combine in the service of capital. Part of the accumulated profits, which are not paid to the worker who 'sells his labor to the capitalist, are used to buy more labor and more means of production which, together, produce more goods to be sold. The capitalist is interested in the production of goods--not, however, in terms of their usefulness but rather in their value as means of exchange, that is, goods that can be sold. What is more, he seeks to produce "goods whose value covers and surpasses the sum of the values of his investment in production--the means of production and the labor." (Karl Marx, Capital, vol. 1) What workers receive as salary for their effort expended in the act of production corresponds only minimally to their effort. What is available for their living is also minimal and, therefore, the wage-earner class reproduces itself.[22]

Here Freire presents a simplified account of Marx's analysis of the basic dynamics of the capitalist economic structure. The working class (those who exist by selling their "labor power", i.e. their capacity to do useful work) never receive the full fruits of their labour. In the course of a given day, they produce a quantity of products for sale on the market (“commodities") with a total value that exceeds the sum of their wages and all other costs of production. The extra, or “surplus”, value is claimed by capitalists (the owners of the means by which production is carried on, e.g. factory, land, raw

materials, machinery) as their profit. They retain part of their profits for their own (luxurious) consumption needs, and re-invest the remainder in additional plant, equipment and labor power to continue the process on an ever-expanding scale (Marx termed this "accumulation"). Their overall wealth and power increases proportionately.

However, this surplus value, which maintains capitalists in their privileged class position, represents nothing other than a part of the daily product of workers which they are obliged to supply to their employers without compensation. (Marx terms this economic relationship "exploitation".) Moreover, the part of their product which is returned to workers in the form of wages is little more than what is required by most workers to subsist from payday to payday. Therefore, through their daily labor, the working class "reproduce" the material basis of the capitalist class, and thereby, the basis of their own subordinate class position.

Paul Belanger refers to "unchallenged economic growth", suggesting that there i's little effective social regulation or coordination of the growth of the accumulation process in Canada. [23] Instead, as Friere points out, the important economic decisions--e.g. what is to be produced, how, by whom, where, in what quantity, etc.--are firmly in the hands of the, capitalist class, and according to the logic of the capitalist economic system, which individual members of this class violate on pain of their own extinction qua capitalists, their primary goal must be the maximization of private profit and not what Freire terms the "development of the collectivity" or the "collective good".[24] Freire counterposes to this the model of a socialist economic structure, in which the surplus produced by the working class is directed toward the collective advancement of the society, and not to the private enrichment of the capitalist class:

> If production is governed by the well-being of the total society, rather than by the capitalist..., then the accumulation of capital --indispensable to development--has a totally different significance and goal. The part of the accumulated capital that is not paid to the worker (i.e. surplus value--H.A.) is not taken from him but is his quota toward the development of the collectivity. And what is to be produced with this quota are not goods defined as necessarily saleable, but goods that are socially necessary.[25]

Competition

In a capitalist economy, the pursuit of profit pits industrialists and businessmen against one another in a competitive struggle which Marx in several passages likens to a military campaign (e.g. "the battle of competition*, and "the industrial war of capitalists among themselves*). [26] The immediate casualties are their workers, for owing the nature of competition, capitalists are driven to hold production costs to a minimum; this means they must reduce the size of their workforces as much as feasible, and pay those who remain as little as possible. [27]

Concerning the drive to reduce the size of their workforces, Marx says:

> This war has the peculiarity that the battles in it are won less by recruiting than by discharging the army of workers. The generals (the capitalists) vie with one another as to who can discharge the greatest number of industrial soldiers.[28]

They do this in large part through the introduction of labor-saving technological innovations. Instead of using technology to make the lives of their workers easier, or to increase the control of workers over the labor process, capitalists are compelled by competitive pressures to employ it to replace more skilled with less skilled workers, to squeeze the maximum output, from every minute of the workers' time, and above all, to get rid of workers. This is one of the principal reasons why unemployment is an endemic feature of capitalist economies, even during periods of relative prosperity. [29] In the decade of the 1970's and into the 1980's, the officially recorded unemployment rate has hovered between 5 and 8 per cent of the workforce in Canada, and recently has gone even higher. [30]

In addition to forcing the capitalist to reduce the size of his workforce as much as possible, competitive pressures compel him to pay those who remain as little as possible. While historically, the rise of the union movement in particular economic sectors forced many employers to substantially raise pay levels, more than two-thirds of the Canadian labor force remains unorganized. [31] Many of these workers are in the category of relatively higher paid supervisory, managerial and professional workers, but in 1971 fully one-third of jobs in Canada paid a wage at 'or below the amount required to maintain a family at the poverty line. [32] Many of these jobs are located in marginal businesses in highly competitive industries such as personal services, textiles, garment manufacturing, and non-durable manufacturing, which in their wages and working conditions often preserve many of the horrors of the 19th century sweatshop.

Exacerbating the effects of these relatively constant Sources of unemployment and poverty in capitalist nations like Canada are more or less regular cycles of economic downturn and recovery (euphemistically referred to as the "business cycle" by orthodox Western economists), and a longer term tendency to exceptional general economic crisis, as exemplified In the Depression of the 1930's and the present severe recession. These periodic slumps, recessions and depressions create high levels of unemployment, and drive many workers into dependence on public assistance. While capitalist politicians often publically deplore rising levels of unemployment during recessionary periods, at likely as not they have actually directly attempted to stimulate them, since in the tortured logic of capitalist economics, high levels of unemployment are seen as one of the best cures for slumps through their influence in moderating the wage demands of workers.

Surplus Population

What these harsh economic conditions have produced in Canada, as they have in other capitalist nations like the U.S., is a split in the working class between a

relatively better-paid, more secure stratum (but one that is not immune to the effects of recession, as the present period is demonstrating), and a large "surplus population" of unemployed and underemployed workers, forced either to fill low-wage Jobs or to remain idle, waiting to be called up during a period of exceptional economic expansion. [33] This latter stratum of the working class is inhabited by those excluded from normal employment, and includes disproportionate numbers of women, recent immigrants, racial and cultural minorities, teenagers, ex-convicts, the handicapped, the aged, residents of low-wage regions like the Maritimes, those without job experience or educational credentials, and those without fundamental literacy and numeracy skills. [34] In 1975, Cy Gonick estimated that they numbered 2 million out of a workforce of 8 million--one quarter. [35] While in the Marxist sense all productive workers face exploitation, members of the surplus population face an extra measure of it in that they receive a significantly smaller portion of the product of their labor than other workers--often below the amount required for normal standards of subsistence. They are what has been termed "superexploited".

Because of their economic vulnerability and victimization by employers, many members of the surplus population share acute needs for special social and educational services, including literacy training and academic upgrading. They form the main potential constituency for ABE, literacy and English language programs. For example, in an article on an English class conducted in a garment factory in Toronto, the authors state that the participants, immigrant women, are "the most marginalized of an already-exploited cheap labor force". The article points out that they are especially vulnerable because they cannot speak the language of the workplace.[36] Similarly, in the report of a Toronto community education project with immigrants who are "marginal workers" employed in service occupations in buildings, hotels and restaurants and in small, labor-intensive manufacturing companies it is pointed out that participants suffer from lack of unions, low wages and poor job conditions. Their situation is one of insecurity and powerlessness. Because they can neither speak nor read and write in English, theirs is a "blind and deaf" reality, full of "problems, needs, pain". The report notes that it is not just an "immigrant problem"--the low-income Canadian-born working class community "face the same problems and confront the same social reality in similar ways as the immigrants".[37] Finally, Serge Wagner refers to the Québécois low-income working class community in Montreal in which he conducted his literacy program as "an area of worker exploitation", supplying "cheap labour" for the economy.[38]

These examples confirm Freire's observation that "in the general context of class society, illiterates are treated as chattel, as oppressed individuals who are refused the right of existence .... [39] However, in the view of adherents of the critical perspective, illiteracy is itself not the key variable--it is just one aspect of a much larger problem. According to the Toronto-based Literacy Working Group:

> we need more than to be literate to cope with our reality in order to develop our lives as human beings capable of mastering our own history, not being passive and oppressed pieces of an economic and political system that condemns us to poverty and exploitation. In such a context the skills of

> reading, writing and basic math are just the skills needed to function as labourers, an anonymous material to be exploited: politically, economically and socially.[40]

The source of the oppressed state of those who we have termed the surplus population does not lie in a lack of literacy skills (or in a lack of job skills, life skills, etc.). Instead, according to the Literacy Working Group, the source is the "conflictive and oppressive ... social, political and economic context...."[41]

The Role of Institutionalized Education

On the basis of arguments and evidence such as have been presented, adherents of the critical perspective hold that as important as upgrading and training opportunities are for members of the surplus population, they can only serve as a palliative with regard to the problem of poverty--i.e. a means of treating its symptoms. They would insist that no mere quantitative increase in education and training can significantly reduce poverty because education does not touch*what Berezowecki calls the "root causes" of poverty, located at the heart of the prevailing economic structure.

Moreover, they would argue that the optimistic faith of adherents of the liberal perspective in the transformative power of government-sponsored education and training betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of the role of. institutionalized education in a capitalist society. Far from being an instrument for the transformation of society, institutionalized education necessarily functions to perpetuate existing social class relationships and economic inequality. In Freire's estimation, this point must be grasped before any progress can be made toward an alternative, liberatory, education practice. [42] Let us now explore the critique of institutionalized education put forward by Freire and others, and then, with this as background, go on to examine various examples of liberatory education.

The State

In the view of George Martell, Canadian educator and specialist on working class literacy, it is important to recognize that governments in Canada are not 'neutral'. The capitalist class is powerful in both an economic and a political sense, and its needs and interests predominate in the affairs of the state. [43] T hus, two main functions of the capitalist state are those of supporting and extending profit-making opportunities (e.g. through managing the economy in ways favourable to corporate interests), and of maintaining social control, i.e. preserving the existing pattern of class relationships so that profit-making will continue into the future.

The function of social control is necessary because some of the more negative byproducts of production on a capitalist basis--e.g. poverty,, exploitation, destruction of the natural environment--often generate serious grievances against the status quo on the part of subordinate classes, and these reactions must somehow be neutralized in

their effects (prevented, controlled, deflected, co-opted, etc.) if existing power relationships are to be maintained.

As a state apparatus, institutionalized education simultaneously fulfills both of these functions--it supports the accumulation process and exerts social control. That is, schooling enhances the productivity of workers at public expense--i.e. through imparting job-relevant skills and knowledge--and helps secure the on-going acquiescence of future workers to their subordinate positions in the existing social, political and economic order. In Freire's words, education functions in a capitalist society to socially "reproduce" from generation to generation "a class of wage earners, obliged to sell their labour to the capitalist class".[44]

Because of its role in preserving the class structure, Freire believes that institutionalized education cannot be considered as an instrument of social transformation:

> There is a more or less widespread and naive belief in the power of institutionalized education in transforming reality. Some of my critics think that I share this assumption. It is not systematic education which somehow moulds society, but on the contrary, society which, according to its particular structure, shapes education in relation to the needs and interests of those who control the power in this society.... (The) role of systematic education, in the repressive society from which it stems... is to preserve that society. Consequently, to conceive of systematic education as an instrument of liberation is simply to invent the rules of the game ....[45]

Socialization

In Canada, according to Martell, part of the role of education systems in preserving the existing class structure involves preparing many working class youth for the dead-end jobs at the bottom of the labour heap. [46] Serge Wagner supplies an example from the Point St. Charles area of Montreal:

> For more than a century it has furnished the "cheap labour" needed for the economy. Yet for more than a century they have had schools there, but this did not change anything in their basic social situation. From father to son, the people have been manual labourers, or seasonal workers (with few exceptions), not because they are less intelligent here than elsewhere, but because it is necessary for the smooth running of "our" economy, "our" society and it is the purpose of schools in working class districts to produce this type of worker.[47]

How do schools help to "produce" such workers? According to Martell, (relying here on the theoretical contributions of U.S. Marxist economists Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis), one mechanism is the so-called "hidden curriculum".[48] That is, the

nature of the socialization received by children in particular schools, or programs within them, varies according to the social class level from which the student body is predominantly drawn, and in turn is designed to prepare them for future occupational positions at roughly the same social class level. Thus, children from impoverished working class backgrounds are largely tracked into terminal vocational programs in which the rituals, rules, authority patterns, etc.--the "hidden curriculum" of the classroom--inculcate in them the self-concepts, personality characteristics and attitudes (e.g. obedience, punctuality, etc.) appropriate to the social. relations of low-wage, service sector occupations. Martell states:

> The socialization... is directed to the development of a properly subordinate character structure suitable for the dead-end work that awaits these kids--or for a life in which they will have no job at all.[49]

On the other hand, the socialization received by children from professional and white collar homes is quite different. They are generally tracked into university preparatory programs in which lessons in obedience are tempered by opportunities for flexibility and self-direction, reflecting the social relations of their probable future managerial and professional occupations. In this way, the "hidden curriculum" of rules, rituals and authority patterns in schools secures the acquiesence of youth to their future positions; in the class structure--including for some of them, slots at the very bottom of that structure.

Reading and Writing

Martell is referring here to the process of education. However, the academic content also helps to socially reproduce candidates for low wage occupations. One of the ways in which this occurs is through what Jean-Paul Hautecoeur, an adult educator employed by the Quebec Ministry of Education, calls the "production of illiteracy".[50] That is, many youth from impoverished "sub-proletarian" working class homes attend "special" classes and vocational programs until age 14 and longer and yet remain illiterate. Their academic.,failure both ratifies and helps perpetuate their marginal status. Hautecoeur so contends that their failure to learn to read is not "accidental" or due to personal deficiencies. Rather, it is the systematic result of, among other things, the way that reading and writing instruction are carried on. [51]

Conventional reading instruction, as it is carried -on in Canadian schools, (and in most adult basic education classes as well), is implicitly premised on a conception of language as a purely technical tool, and a complementary conception of reading as the purely technical act of recovering the 'neutral' information which printed or written language is thought to convey. [52] However, as Freire points out, language is not neutral; it is an expression of consciousness which conveys information, but also implicitly expresses attitudes, values, views of the world, which are shaped by one's existential position--economic, political, cultural, etc. If one lives within oppressive social relationships, they will find expression in one's consciousness and, ultimately, in

the language one uses to discuss reality.[53] For example, Serge Wagner contrasts the . language and grammar of the French-speaking Quebec working class with the academic French spoken by the dominant class:

> Take, for example, the word "work". Although the significance is the same, what it means differs according to whether the word is used by a labourer or worker, or by a senior executive or a boss. When one considers language from a moral and normative point of view and the norm suggested is “good French”, you are not only imposing the language of the boss on the worker but also his vision of society.[54]

According to George Martell, the language, and therefore the "vision of society" (i.e. the ideology) which is dominant in classrooms in Canada, is that of the middle class--one that reinforces existing power relationships:

> The nature of this language corresponds to the work of its users, a class "in the middle", ironing out bureau-cratic wrinkles and laundering unpleasant realities. It's the language...of euphemism, of small problems and hard solutions. It's language that has only words for the middle ground, of toothless reform, language which divides history between neurotic revolutionaries and encrusted reactionaries as a defence for the "reasonable" people in the middle who won. Or that lets you analyze a strike, "taking both sides into account", the boss offering $2.00 an hour, the union demanding $3.00, permitting you to come up with the "reasonable" solution of $2.50 an hour. It's language that does not tell the reality of bringing up a family on that amount.[55]

Conventional reading instruction (as based on a liberal perspective) conceals this vital ideological relationship of language to reality behind a technocratic facade (i.e. language as merely a neutral technical tool, reading simply as decoding). As a result, it imposes this middle class vision "behind the backs" of the learners from working class homes, and so serves to alienate them from their own political, economic and social realities. According to Martell:

> the further down a child is on the class scale, the less appropriate is this middle-class language to him, the more it obscures his reality .... [56]

What is not permitted in the classroom is language which could serve to reveal this reality, which could help working class children to:

> define their class enemies and understand their friends, both in terms of their present oppression and their future resistance to it... (or) ... find a place for themselves inside a larger movement of working-class people.[57]

Martell believes that the imposition of this middle class language is an important cause-of illiteracy among working class children. He argues that:

> the more oppressed a kid is (the further down the class scale he is), the more alienated he will become from a language that doesn't recognize or try to do anything about his oppression, and the worse he will be able to handle it. Thus we get the remarkably close correlation we do between socio-economic class standing and reading scores. In other words, kids from working class backgrounds are being made "dumb", a significantly double-edged word, meaning both someone without use of words and someone who's unintelligent. What's being created, to use Paulo Freire's phrase, is a "culture of silence", the silence deepening with the depth of the oppression.[58]

Such youth are already socially and economically marginal; the school system merely confirms or ratifies their marginalization. Because all of this happens according to seemingly "fair" and "objective" criteria. the youth are persuaded that their lack of academic success is a result of personal inadequacy, and that they, like their parents before them, are only fit to be the "cheap labour" required by the low-pay service sector industries and labour-intensive manufacturing plants of the economy.[59] In this way, schooling contributes to the continuation over time (or in Freire's words, "reproduction") of this highly exploited segment of the working class. Of course, this is not an intended outcome, either on the part of the school system or the teachers. However, as Hautecoeur points out, neither is it accidental. That is, it is the predictable result of the manner in which the form and content of education in a capitalist society are, as Freire observes, shaped according to the needs and interests of the dominant, i.e. capitalist, class.

Liberal Adult Basic Education

We have seen how the youth education system responds to the need of the capitalist class for the reproduction of a stratum of cheap labour in the working class. Adherents of the critical perspective identify a similar process at work in adult basic education as carried on by the state, particularly the Canada Manpower Training Program. For example, Anthony Berezowecki points out that the interests of the dominant class prevail in the structure and control of the Manpower program:

> Rarely are the institutions and staff responsible to their real constituency, the disadvantaged adult, instead, the control rests with persons whose backgrounds and interests greatly differ from those of the disadvantaged. Control and goal-setting are still kept securely out of the hands of the disadvantaged who are being researched and are havIng things done for and to them .... The way in which the disadvantaged must develop and the goals they must follow are defined in ways which are only familiar to the affluent and which will largely satisfy the needs of the affluent.[60]

The main objectives are increasing the productivity of the poor and unemployed, i.e. enhancing their value to employers, while extending "social control" over them, i.e. obtaining their acquiesence to their subordinate positions.

For example, Berezowecki argues the "life skills" training component of the Manpower program is inadequate as an anti-poverty strategy because the primary objective is adapt participants to the demands of the job market. [61] Critical examination of what he calls the "root cause" of poverty--the "existing Canadian socio-economic system"--is not included. Obviously, the latter would not be conducive to training "good", i.e. obedient, adaptable, employees. Instead, the programs concentrate on what he calls the "symptoms" of oppression as they are manifested in the lives of clients, e.g. "a negative attitude toward themselves, their self -development and their home and family responsibilities". It is not taken into account that these may actually be "realistic responses to a particularly oppressive situation" faced by the poor in their daily lives, and that to concentrate on changing these symptoms while ignoring their cause only serves to "domesticate" the poor, which Berezowecki defines as "conditioning of the poor to accept their lot".[62] In his view:

> most adult basic education programs optimistically assume that the problems can be overcome simply by educating the disadvantaged and modifying their behaviour in socially desirable ways. Thus society's interests are safeguarded and there is no threat to the status quo. The present order, priorities and structures of Canawan society need not be altered; only the disadvantaged need be altered.[63]

Similarly, Serge Wagner found through his experience with literacy education in Montreal that literacy texts and materials for adults in common use are:

> tracts to train and domesticate the working class ... to fit into the capitalist system .... When you realize that these texts are edited for society's rejects, you cannot help being thoroughly disheartened by the resignation and docility that is being preached to them.[64]

Like youth education, adult basic education and literacy training based on the liberal "adaptation" model serves to socially "reproduce" among the surplus population stratum of the working class the attitudes, values and. personality characteristics appropriate for their on-going role as cheap labour in the economy. In this way, Institutionalized adult basic education helps to perpetuate inequality rather than contribute to its transformation.

In spite of the serious flaws in the "adaptive" or "remediation" strategy of mainstream liberal ABE and literacy programs, adherents of the critical perspective do not advocate dismantling them or of abandoning attempts 'to extend institutionalized adult basic education opportunities to the poor. In Wagner's view:

> it is obvious that literacy training solves basic needs: learning how to read and write in a literate society like ours is not a luxury.[65]

Hautecoeur believes that while existing institutional literacy programs are inadequate:

> One must recognize nevertheless that all means of quantitative and qualitative development in providing schools or scholastic elimination of illiteracy are to be favoured, encouraged and increased.[66]

What adherents of the critical perspective do insist, however, is that in view of the failure of the liberal perspective as a theoretical and practical guide for adult literacy and basic education, a quite different, liberatory, education approach must be developed and implemented. It must embody what Freire calls a “clear perception of the dynamic relations between society and education”.. [67] In the following chapter, the nature of liberatory adult basic education will be explored, particularly with reference to Canada.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 4

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2. Loney, ibid., p. 451-459.

3. Ibid., p. 464-466.

4. Silver Donald Cameron, The Education of Everett Richardson: The Nova Scotia Fishermen’s Strike, 1970-71 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977).

5. Cy Gonick, Inflation or Depression (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1975), p. 370-375.

6. W. Michael Brooke, “Editorial,” B.T.S.D. Review 1:2 (January 1973).

7. D’Arcy Martin, “Reappraising Freire: The Potential and Limits of Conscientization,” Masters Thesis, University of Toronto, 1975, p. 106.

8. Ibid., “Introdution.”

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11. Anthony R. Berezowecki, “Liberation or Domestication: Adult Basis Education in Canada,” Literacy Discussion 5:4 (1974), p. 610.

12. Paul Bèlanger, “Epilogue,” Literacy Discussion 5:4 (1974), p. 68.

13. Berezowecki, op.cit., p. 613.

14. Belanger, op.cit., p. 680.

15. Ibid., p. 681.

16. Ibid., p. 681.

17. Ibid., p. 680.

18. Berezowecki, op.cit., p. 612.

19. Belanger, op.cit., p. 681.

20. Serge Wagner, "Literacy and Citizenship," B.T.S.D. Review 3:2 (February 1975), p. 5.

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29. Ibid., p. 33.

30. Paul Gingrich, "Unemployment and Capitalist Crisis" in Fred Caloren et.al., Is the Canadian Economy Closing Down? (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1978) p. 104.

31. Gonick, op.cit., p. 383.

32. Calculations based on the poverty line developed in Ian Adams, The Real Poverty Report (Edmonton: M.G. Hurtig Limited, 1971) and 1971 census data.

33. Stephen Schecter, "Capitalism, Class, and Educational Reform in Canada" in Leo Panitch (ed.) The Canadian State: Political Economy and Political Power

(Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), p. 399-400.

34. Ibid., p. 399-400 and Gonick, op.cit., p. 151-157.

35. Gonick, ibid., p. 152.

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37. St. Christopher House: Services to Adults, "Community Development and Education: An Experience in Literacy," (mimeo: March 1978).

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41. Ibid., p. 1.

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43. George Martell, "The Schools, the State and the Corporations" in George Martell (ed.) The Politics of the Canadian Public School (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1974), p. 5.

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47. Wagner, op.cit., p. 5-6.

48. Martell, op.cit., p. 18-19.

49. Ibid., p. 11.

50. Jean Paul Hautecoeur, "L'Alphabétisation: quelques questions," Literacy 3:3 (Summer 1978), p. 9.

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52. Martell, op.cit., p. 19-22; Freire, Pedagogy in Process, op.cit., p. 23; D'Arcy

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53. D’Arcy Martin and Rick Williams, op.cit., p. 38-39.

54. Wagner, op.cit., p. 4.

55. Martel, op.cit., p. 21-22.

56. Ibid., p. 20.

57. Ibid., p. 20.

58. Ibid., p. 20.

59. Hautecoeur, op.cit., p. 10., Wagner op.cit., p. 5-6.

60. Berezowecki, op.cit., p. 609.

61. Ibid., p. 611.

62. Ibid., p. 612.

63. Ibid., p. 610-611.

64. Wagner, op.cit., p. 3.

65. Ibid., p. 4.

66. Hautecoeur, op.cit., p. 10.

67. Freire, “Literacy and the Possible Dream,” op.cit., p. 69.