

# **Marx and Education in Russia and China**

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**Ronald F. Price**

# MARX AND EDUCATION IN RUSSIA AND CHINA

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RONALD F. PRICE



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To the memory of Roger and Marjorie Manning  
who once helped a young  
student towards a wider view

To Erika who has continued  
that process

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## FOREWORD

This book took shape during some four years of teaching courses to post-graduate teacher-students on education in China and the USSR. I am grateful to them for discussions which raised new issues and helped to clarify others. Since the concept of education, to include political socialisation, is a broad topic, I hope the book will be of interest to the more general reader as well as to students of comparative and international education.

To many education students, Russian and/or Chinese education is at the same time their introduction to marxism, and many students go no further. This book is an attempt to set the record right by giving a thorough introduction to the writings of Marx himself as they relate to education. It attempts to show what marxism implies for education, as aim, method and content. It then goes on to compare educational developments in the USSR and China in the light of this analysis, attempting to answer the question as to how marxist this has been, in the schools and outside them. Since both countries claim marxist inspiration for what they do I believe that this is a necessary and fruitful approach which can, in turn, throw light upon our own educational problems.

The use of Russia in title and text is a conscious choice since, first, it points to Russian dominance over events in the USSR and secondly, I have not dealt with national minorities in either country except in respect of the problems of language and education which their presence presents.

In addition to my students many others have helped me during the writing of this book. May I specially mention the staff of the Library of La Trobe University who have greatly reduced 'the tyranny of distance', and our Centre secretaries who have helped with typing.

December 1976.

R.F. Price

This book is a major contribution to the understanding of the role of the state in the development of the economy. It is a book that should be read by all those who are interested in the development of the economy. The book is a major contribution to the understanding of the role of the state in the development of the economy. It is a book that should be read by all those who are interested in the development of the economy.

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# 1

## MARX AND EDUCATION

### Man, Alienation and the Vision of Communism

While marxism is not a humanism in the sense of assuming the theoretical priority of man over society, its *raison d'être* is a concern with man's potential, both as individual and group. In that famous early statement, *The German Ideology*, where Marx and Engels clarified their views in a criticism of the Young Hegelians and contemporary utopian socialists, they wrote:

The premises from which we begin are not arbitrary ones, not dogmas, but real premises from which abstraction can only be made in the imagination. They are the real individuals, their activity and the material conditions under which they live, both those which they find already existing and those produced by their activity. (*GI*, p. 31)

In everything Marx wrote, whether the early *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* of 1844 or the *Capital* (1867) of his maturity, there is protest against the present state of man and affirmation of belief in his future. The object of his prodigious labours was an attempt to understand the world in order to change it.

In a number of famous passages Marx compares man with other animals and brings out his peculiarly human characteristics. In the Feuerbach section of *The German Ideology* he and Engels wrote:

Men can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion or anything else you like. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to *produce* their means of subsistence, a step which is conditioned by their physical organization. By producing their means of subsistence men are indirectly producing their actual material life. (*GI*, p. 31)

In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, where he used Feuerbach's concept of *species being* to refer to those qualities which were uniquely human (Ollman, p. 84) Marx developed the vision of man as having 'free, conscious activity' as his 'species character', a vision which is important for education. He wrote:

in the first place labour, *life-activity*, *productive life* itself, appears to man merely as a *means* of satisfying a need—the need to maintain the physical existence. Yet the productive life is the life of the species. It is life-engendering life. The whole character of a species—its species character—is contained in the character of its life-activity, and free, conscious activity is man's species character . . .

In creating an *objective world* by his practical activity, in *working-up*, inorganic nature, man proves himself a conscious species being, i.e., as a being that treats the species as its own essential being, or that treats itself as a species being. Admittedly animals also produce. They build themselves nests, dwellings, like the bees, beavers, ants, etc. But an animal only produces what it immediately needs for itself or its young. It produces one-sidedly, whilst man produces universally. It produces only under the dominion of immediate physical need, whilst man produces even when he is free from physical need and *only truly produces in freedom therefrom*. An animal produces only itself, whilst man reproduces the whole of nature. An animal's product belongs immediately to its physical body, whilst man freely confronts his product. An animal forms things in accordance with the standard and the need of the species to which it belongs, whilst man knows how to produce in accordance with the standard of every species, and knows how to apply everywhere the inherent standard to the object. (*EPM*, pp. 75-6)

But labour is not only a process of creation, but of self-creation in which man is also his own educator.

Labour is, in the first place, a process in which both man and Nature participate, and in which man of his own accord starts, regulates, and controls the material re-actions between himself and Nature. He opposes himself to Nature as one of her own forces, setting in motion arms and legs, head and hands, the natural forces of his body, in order to appropriate Nature's productions in a form adapted to his own wants. *By thus acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature*. He develops his slumbering powers and compels them to act in obedience to his sway. (*Capital I*, pp. 197-8, emphasis added)

In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* he gives Hegel the credit for this understanding:



Hegel conceives the self-creating of man as a process, . . . he thus grasps the essence of *labour* and comprehends objective man—true, because real man—as the outcome of man's own labour. (*EPM*, p. 177)

In 1845, in the third thesis on Feuerbach, Marx referred specifically to education. The materialism he criticises here is the French variety mentioned in *The Holy Family* (*HF*, pp. 175-6).

The materialist doctrine concerning the changing of circumstances and upbringing forgets that circumstances are changed by men and that it is essential to educate the educator himself. This doctrine must, therefore, divide society into two parts, one of which is superior to society.

The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-changing can be conceived and rationally understood only as *revolutionary practice*. (*GI*, p. 660)

The same passage in *Capital* quoted above goes on to set man's peculiar creativity in the historical context of nineteenth-century capitalist society. Enjoyment, which as Timpanaro today stresses is 'the basis of all scientific systems of ethics' (Timpanaro, pp. 66, 108) is here posed as problematic.

An immeasurable interval of time separates the state of things in which a man brings his labour-power to market for sale as a commodity, from that state in which human labour was still in its first instinctive stage. We presuppose labour in a form that stamps it as exclusively human. A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But *what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality*. At the end of every labour-process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement. He not only effects a change of form in the material on which he worked, but he also realises a purpose of his own that gives the law to his *modus operandi*, and to which he must subordinate his will. And this subordination is no mere momentary act. Besides the exertion of the bodily organs, the process demands that, during the whole operation, the workman's will be steadily consonance with his purpose. This means close