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Joining the Party *Critical Education and the Question of Organization*

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Abstract

In the proliferation of "critical" educational scholarship there is a glaring omission, and that is research on the Party-form. Indeed, even when theorists like Gramsci and Lukàcs are discussed in critical education their work is always abstracted from its context: the Communist Party. This article contends that if critical education wants to orient toward the overthrow of capitalism then it has to take the Party seriously. I counter the misrepresentations and caricatures of the Party-form by carefully reading Lenin, Lukàcs, and Dean. I show that the Party is a student of the mass struggle, that it is disciplined to the full subjectivity of the proletariat, and that it is ultimately a form of unknowing and the organization of a lack. I conclude by delineating four concrete steps that critical educators can take toward building the Party.



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There is no option but to form a new party—not a party to rule the people, but to draw out the masses from within the people. Not a partial party that rules the entirety, but an entirety that produces a part—the body triumphing over the cancer.

– Muammar Qaddafi

Introduction

With battles intensifying over school privatizations and closings, teacher layoffs, standardized testing regimes, Common Core Standards, the corporatization of education, conservative attacks on curriculum, and so on, critical education certainly hasn't suffered from irrelevance or from a lack of targets to critique and attack. On a daily basis we see journal articles, special issues, journals, edited books, monographs, book series, panels, conference, and blog posts popping up. This isn't a dig at critical education, as if the observation that the proliferation of research on what is called neoliberalism in education can be made to circulate quite well within capitalism is a novel—or even interesting—one to make. Rather, this proliferation of research, inquiry, and action is a sign that critical education today is healthy and growing, not stagnating or declining.

While a variety of “critical” perspectives operate within the field of critical education, the ways in which current struggles over education are bound up with changes in economic organization (i.e., the move from Keynesianism to neoliberalism), many critical educators deploy a Marxist optic in their analysis. Scholars like Peter McLaren (2000; 2005; 2015; 2016), Paula Allman (2010), Ramin Farahmandpur (McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2005), Sandy Grande (2004), Pauline Lipman (2011), Graham Slater (2014), Tyson Lewis (2012a; 2012b), Wayne Au (2016), Alexander Means (2014), and Curry Malott (2012; 2016) have, in various ways, turned to Marx and Marxists to understand the contemporary coordinates of educational oppression and resistance. With all of this research calling on Marxism, however, there is one glaring omission, and that is research on the Party. This omission is most glaring in critical educational engagements with Antonio Gramsci. As John Holst (2010) has observed, “what remains a constant in education-based Gramsci studies is the nearly universal minimization... of this work for what it was, namely *party work*” (p. 38). Indeed, for Gramsci the existence of the Party was a presupposition for all of his formulations and theories. Gramsci was, after all, a lifelong member of the Communist Party of Italy—a Marxist Party of the Leninist type.

While Holst has helped situate Gramsci as a Party member, the Leninist origins of the Party have not made an appearance in critical education. This is problematic for several reasons. For one, the Party has—and continues to have—a profound impact on world history. The Party-form has dramatically reshaped the globe, directly influencing revolutions in Latin America, Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. In addition to weighing heavily on history, however, the Party is particularly concerned with the relationship between theory and action, or *praxis*, which is of such concern to critical education. In fact the Party was absolutely fundamental to Paulo Freire—arguably the original educational theorist of praxis—and it was particularly important for his *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. As Tyson Lewis (2012b) contends, “Freire himself clearly saw his pedagogy as a tool to be used within revolutionary organization to mediate the

various relationships between the oppressed and the leaders of the resistance” (p. 102).¹ Unfortunately Freire’s thought today—like Gramsci’s—has been severed from this foundational, undergirding context.

The purpose of this paper is to introduce the Party into critical education in a systematic manner, and my hope is that this will start the process of uniting the struggle for education under the struggle for communism.² It is my hope, in other words, that the tremendous insight, experience, and dedication of critical educational scholars and activists will be absorbed within the Party, the collectivity-in-becoming that orients towards and steers through the uncertain and unpredictable revolutionary process.

To enter into this conversation I briefly survey some of the ways that Lenin—the original theorist of the Party—has been taken up in education before touching on the way that Lenin’s perhaps most important contribution to the revolutionary movement is caricatured, misrepresented, and dismissed, even among Marxist critical educational scholars. In order to correct these caricatures and misrepresentations, I move to a careful reading of Lenin’s theorization of the Party, sticking close to his groundbreaking work, *What is to be Done?* I explain what Lenin means by the Party-form and why Lenin was moved to theorize this organizational form in the first place. I draw out several characteristics of the Party for Lenin: the formation of revolutionary consciousness, the process of revolutionary theory production, and the need for a revolutionary organization of dedicated revolutionaries. Throughout this I pay careful attention—as Lenin did—to the relationship between the Party and the masses, showing how the Party is the vanguard because it is a student of the mass struggle. I then move to two other theorists of the Party: Georg Lukàcs and Jodi Dean. Lukàcs brings out the importance of discipline in revolution, which entails not just the discipline of the member to the Party but also the discipline of the Party to the full subjectivity of workers. Dean, as a contemporary theorist of the Party, brings Lenin and Lukàcs into the current era through her reading of Occupy Wall Street as an embryonic form of the Party. Dean is also helpful because she emphasizes the Party as the maintenance of the desire of the collective for the collective. I conclude by reiterating that, *if* critical education wants to contribute to the overthrow of capitalism (which not all critical educationalists want to do), *then* we have to take the Party seriously. More than that, we have to join the Party, and in closing I delineate a few concrete actions that we can take to contribute to building the Party and orienting the movement toward the uncertain and unpredictable insurrectionary moment.

¹ Lewis makes this observation in an important paper that teases out some differences and contradictions between different “registers” of Marxism(s) within education. While Lewis does a service in this, nowhere in the article does Lewis mention Lenin. He does mention the Party, but because he doesn’t reference Lenin his argument suffers from an inadequate understanding of the Party-form. This is evidenced two places: 1) when he separates Freire from the Party, arguing “Through dialogue, Freire is able to make a critical move away from a vanguard position while still remaining with the problematic of revolutionary leadership inaugurated by Lukàcs” (p. 102); 2) when he separates Gramsci from Lukàcs and, by extension, the Leninist Party.

² My primary audience for this paper is in the United States, although given the near universal applicability of the Party, the arguments can be applied more widely—especially in imperialist countries. I speak about “the Party” in the singular, although there are many Marxist-Leninist parties (the “alphabet soup,” as we call them) in imperialist countries.

Taking and Leaving Lenin in Critical Education

The primary way in which critical education has taken up Lenin has been through his work on imperialism. McLaren and Farahmandpur (2005), for example, call on Lenin's theory of imperialism to argue against Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's theory of Empire, which has radically influenced the left since the turn of the century.³ McLaren and Farahmandpur argue—correctly, in my opinion—that while Hardt and Negri offer important insights in changes in the capitalist mode of production, the composition of labor, and the organization of global power, the fundamental claim “that state power has become obsolete or that its role has significantly diminished” (p. 3) does not correspond to the current order of things. While *international* organizations are more important today than they were when Lenin was writing, they are still anchored in the sovereignty of (certain) nation states, and this sovereignty has not been superseded by a boundless, fluid, all-encompassing, and flexible (and, it turns out, unidentifiable) *supranational* organism called Empire. Thus, Lenin's (1917/1975) thesis on imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism is still correct, and inter-imperialist rivalries are still the driving sources of war and violence today.⁴

Lenin's scattered thoughts on education are the subject of a recent paper by Simon Boxley (2015). Acknowledging that Lenin's remarks here are quite “thin” and that “those he does make are generally rather unfavourable towards any meaningful chance of pedagogic sabotage” (p. 45), Boxley draws on Lenin's concern with “everyday education” to draw out some lessons for the educational left in the United Kingdom. Lenin—who was the son of a teacher—believed that politics and education are inseparable but cannot be reduced to each other. The lesson that Lenin can teach us, according to Boxley, is that, while we shouldn't overestimate the power of education to transform society, we can do damage through our pedagogic interventions. More importantly, Lenin teaches us that we shouldn't discourage participation in schools and even in the acquisition of uncritical knowledge as we wait for the revolution to come.

Most relevant to the task at hand is a 2006 article by Wayne Au on Vygotsky, Lenin, and learning.⁵ Seeking to resituate Vygotsky within the political and theoretical tradition of Marxist-Leninism, Au draws correlations, parallels, and similarities between Vygotsky's theories of human development and Lenin's theories of social and political development. Au (2006) demonstrates that Vygotsky's theories of development represent “scaled-down versions of Lenin's conceptual framework in which Lenin's social/macro analysis correlates with Vygotsky's own individual/micro analysis” (p. 292). Au draws parallels between Lenin's spontaneity/consciousness dialectic and Vygotsky's everyday/scientific concepts and between Vygotsky's zone of proximal development and the role of revolutionary leadership for Lenin. Au's article doesn't address the Party in a systematic way, although it does argue that Vygotsky can help us think about the development of revolutionary consciousness, which is one task of the Party.

³ McLaren and Farahmandpur (2005) do mention the Party briefly in this book, drawing on Žižek's (correct) claim that what is important in Lenin is not just his anticapitalism but how he critiques “the liberal, parliamentary, democratic consensus” (p. 63). But the Party is never theorized.

⁴ Those interested in a book-length assessment of how Lenin's thesis on imperialism has fared over the last century should see *Imperialism in the 21st century: Updating Lenin's theory a century later*, edited by Ben Becker.

⁵ It's worth noting that Au's piece was published in a Marxist journal, *Science & Society*, and not an education journal.

Of course, Paulo Freire (1970/2011) also cites Lenin when he writes about establishing the correct relationship between revolutionary leaders and masses. In fact, in the final chapter of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Freire cites Lenin's (1902/1987) maxim that "without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary practice" (p. 69) as *the definition* of "praxis" as "*reflection and action*" (Freire, 1970/2011, p. 126). He also draws on Lenin when he thinks through the correct relationship between revolutionary leaders and the masses and his theorization of "cultural synthesis" (p. 183). However, Freire's interest was in the pedagogical inflection of the Party and not in a systematic reading of the Party.

Not only has the Party not been sufficiently theorized in critical education, it has also been misrepresented and caricatured in the field, even in the field's Marxist wing. Mike Cole (2008), for example, writes that Lenin's theory of the Party "rests on a particular ontological presupposition: that there is an 'outside' of capital's social universe" (p. 73). In this way, Lenin "assumes that a group of people—bourgeois intellectuals—can exist socially *qua* intellectuals outside of, and beyond, capital" (ibid.). This, as I show below, is at best a severe misreading of Lenin. Other times Lenin is mentioned and then dismissed without any legitimation. Paula Allman (2010) does as much when she writes, in a footnote, that "Lenin's idea [of the Party] may, or may not, have been appropriate for his specific circumstances, but I doubt whether he or any other dialectical thinker would suggest that it would be adopted unthinkingly in other circumstances" (p. 147, f2). While Allman says elsewhere in the book that there is are "problems... with the notion of the revolutionary vanguard" (p. 132), she never deals or explicitly acknowledges these problems, despite her assurances that she will. It seems that because Lenin wouldn't want us to adopt the Party unthinkingly we don't need to talk about it at all (of course, Allman has no problem calling on the Leninist Party member and theoretician Gramsci to develop her brand of critical education).⁶

To be sure, critical educators aren't alone in their avoidance of the Party. Unfortunately, the notion of the Party today causes many on the left to issue-knee jerk condemnations of elitism, Jacobinism, or modernism. These reactions and condemnations, however, circulate precisely because there is no systematic inquiry into what exactly the Party is—and what it is not.

Lenin: The Party as the Student of Spontaneity

In order to begin a systematic reading of the Party we need to concentrate on *What is to be Done?* Lenin's seminal study on organization and revolutionary leadership, written and published in 1902. Like all of Lenin's writings, *What is to be Done?* was a specific intervention in a specific moment in the communist movement. The pressing problem that it addressed was the emergence of economism, which branded itself as a new "critical" tendency in the socialist movement. The main proponent of economism was Eduard Bernstein, a leading theoretician in the German Social Democratic Party, but economism had deeply influenced the Russian communist movement as well. While today we are conditioned to think that "critical" is necessarily a good position to take, whether or not it is a good position to take depends on from what position one is critical. The economists were "critical" of "orthodox Marxism" and its

⁶ I suspect that Allman's (2010) half-hearted attempt to dismiss the Leninist Party is out of a desire distance herself from actually-existing socialism. Elsewhere in the book, for example, she writes that "Marx's vision of socialism/communism... differs considerably from anything we witnessed in the twentieth century" (p. 150). For why this is problematic, see Malott and Ford (2015).

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insistence on the class struggle and the dictatorship of the proletariat; “The very conception, ‘ultimate aim,’ [of Marxism] was declared to be unsound” (Lenin, 1902/1987, p. 55) by the economists.

Revolutionary Consciousness

The economists believed that the working class would, on its own through the struggle in the economic realm, overthrow capitalism and institute socialism. Representatives of economism held that the working class develops its own consciousness and forms of organization spontaneously as a result of its daily struggles against the bosses and, more importantly, that these would be sufficient for the overthrow of capitalism. Lenin, by contrast, argued that spontaneity “represents nothing more nor less than consciousness in an *embryonic form*” (p. 74). Workers experience exploitation directly and spontaneously resist this exploitation, by strikes, sabotaging, combining in unions, and so on. Consciousness, however, is something different; it is, as Au (2007) puts it:

the willfull application of a systematic and materialist analysis of social conditions and relations, making use of summation and generalization as forms of abstraction for understanding what is happening in the world in preparation for purposeful, volitional action to change that world. (p. 278, emphasis in original)

Lenin is by no means against spontaneity, which would be akin to being opposed to breathing; it’s rather than spontaneity isn’t enough. Or, rather, spontaneity is enough for micropolitics and localized struggles against particular enemies in particular places. But it isn’t enough for the revolutionary overthrow of the entire sociopolitical order of capitalism. For that, revolutionary organization is necessary. “We revolutionary Social-Democrats,” Lenin (1902/1987) writes, “are dissatisfied with this worshipping of spontaneity, *i.e.*, worshipping what is ‘at the present time’” (p. 67). One of the main weaknesses of spontaneity is thus that it is limited to *what is*, in terms of both forms of struggle and overall objectives of struggle. A brief history of working-class struggle demonstrates

that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness, *i.e.*, it may itself realize the necessity for combining in unions, for fighting against the employers and for striving to compel the government to pass necessary legislation, etc. (p. 74)

Workers *experience* exploitation directly: we suffer from being overworked and underpaid, from being deprived of safe and sufficient working conditions and work breaks, from job insecurity, and so on. We don’t need Lenin or the Party to tell us any of these things. We know that they are happening, we literally feel them throughout our bodies. Yet there is a type of consciousness that doesn’t flow directly from experience and this type of consciousness has to do with the relationship of our experience to the relationship of broader social, economic, and political forces at differing scales: within the factory, the city, the state, and the world. This type of consciousness is only generated and spread through organization.

At the time, this knowledge—the type that could produce consciousness—was created and imputed through “factory exposures,” which were leaflets that documented, detailed, and (to varying degrees) contextualized conditions in the factories. Lenin argued that these exposures had to be expanded and deepened. He complained that they “merely dealt with the relations

between the workers *in a given trade* and their immediate employers,” and that as a result workers only “learned to sell their ‘commodity’ on better terms” (p. 95). This is trade-union consciousness, which is limited to the economic realm and the exchange between the buyers and sellers of labor-power. To contribute to the development of revolutionary consciousness these exposures had to be *political-economic*, that is, they had to be situated at the nexus of work (exploitation) and the political system that legalizes and legitimates exploitation.

One of the reasons why the economists bowed to spontaneity and settled for trade-union consciousness was because they believed that the economic realm was the most likely to draw workers into struggle. The economists, that is, were economic reductionists. Lenin was not: “*All and sundry* manifestations of police tyranny and autocratic outrage... the flogging of the peasantry, the corruption of the officials, the conduct of the police towards the ‘common people’ in the cities... the persecution of the religious sects...” (pp. 96-97), these were all examples of acts of oppression that drew people into struggle. Lenin goes further, however, and maintains that the economic mustn’t be privileged *a priori* over the political. The nexus between the economic and the political has to be thought through carefully and consistently, and this requires theory.

Revolutionary Theoreticians

The role of theory is a central concern for Lenin and it is one of the justifications for the Party. It is also the source of some rather unnecessary confusion, which has resulted in accusations of “elitism” against the Leninist Party. It is often held that the Party has the “answer” for the masses, the answer that they are incapable of realizing on their own. What, then, does Lenin actually say about theory and, relatedly, the role of leadership? As shown above, Lenin insists that the working-class movement can’t spontaneously develop the theoretical understanding of the present totality, so *who can*?

Taken as a coherent text, *What is to be done?* poses one answer to this question: the Party. Taken as fragments disconnected from a whole, however, Lenin can appear to take contradictory stances on this question, some of which can be read as elitist. For example, Lenin writes that, while the working class is responsible for trade-union consciousness, “The theory of socialism... grew out of the philosophic, historical and economic theories that were elaborated by the educated representatives of the propertied classes, the intellectuals” (p. 74). In this sentence Lenin is referring specifically to Marx and Engels, who were part of a “bourgeois intelligentsia” (ibid.). However, Lenin also remarks that workers play a “part in creating such an [socialist] ideology. But they take part not as workers, but as socialist theoreticians” (p. 82f1). In the first quote about the bourgeois intelligentsia Lenin is making a historical observation; he is acknowledging the fact that the scientific critique of political economy came from Marx and Engels. In the second quote Lenin is making a historical and contemporary observation and a theoretical move: that workers can and do theorize, but when they do so they are other than workers. This second quote, which appears as a footnote, can be confusing, but it is clarified later in the text, when Lenin delivers his ultimate formulation of *who* theorizes. Lenin writes that the Party creates a particular group of theoreticians: In the Party, Lenin writes, “*all distinctions as between workers and intellectuals... must be obliterated*” (p. 137). While those of bourgeois origins are not excluded from Party membership, Lenin writes that the Party must primarily recruit professional revolutionaries from within the working class.

The Party draws its ranks from the working class because it views the working class as its *equal*. Lenin holds workers in high regard; he in no way looks down on them as incapable. Actually, Lenin chastises those who look down on workers. Again, he takes aim at the economists who want to appeal to the “average worker,” responding: “You, gentlemen, who are so much concerned about the ‘average worker,’ as a matter of fact, rather insult the workers by your desire to *talk down* to them when discussing labor politics and labor organization” (p. 153). Lenin writes that the communist organizers thus far have held workers “back by our silly speeches about what ‘can be understood’ by the masses of the workers, by the ‘average workers,’ etc.” (p. 156). The Party is not a vanguard because it is ahead of the workers; it is a vanguard because it is composed of workers who are advanced in that they have undergone education and training together in the Party. The Party, in other words, is a vanguard because, as an *organization*, it is advanced relative to the mass struggle.

Revolutionary Organization

The Party is an organization that consolidates and advances spontaneity. The relationship between organization and spontaneity is similar to the relationship between spontaneity and consciousness described above. Spontaneity is not only the embryo of consciousness, it is also the germ of organization. Antonio Negri (2014) provides a useful way to understand this relationship: “Organization is the verification of spontaneity, its refinement... Organization is spontaneity reflecting upon itself” (p. 32). Through organization we reflect on the successes and defeats of protests, strikes, insurrections, reading groups, propaganda composition and distribution, and so on. Through organization we consolidate expand each area of struggle. We—Party members—collectively go through these experiences and learn from them, *advancing* as a result of such inquiry and reflection; this is what makes the Party the *advanced guard*.

The Leninist Party itself comes about as a lesson through the successes and defeats of the spontaneous mass struggle in Russia. We can read this point through Lenin’s response to a position spelled out in the journal *Rabocheye Dyelo* (translated as “Workers’ Cause), which was the main theoretical outlet of the Union of Russian Social Democrats Abroad. Through this paper the organization writes that they believe that what “will mostly *determine the tasks* [our italics] and the character of the literary activity of the ‘League,’ is the *mass labor movement* [*Rabocheye Dyelo*’s italics] that has arisen in recent years” (quoted in Lenin, 1902/1987, p. 87). There are two ways that this can be interpreted:

Either it means subservience to the spontaneity of this movement, *i.e.*, reducing the role of Social-Democracy to mere subservience to the labor movement as such... *or* it may mean that the mass movement puts before us *new*, theoretical, political and organizational tasks, far more complicated than those that might have satisfied us in the period before the rise of the mass movement. (ibid.)

Lenin, of course, interprets *Rabocheye Dyelo*’s statement in the second manner, against the paper’s intention. In this way, the mass struggle is the teacher and the Party is the student; the mass struggle poses the problem that the Party has to solve, a problem to which the mass struggle doesn’t have the answer. The mass struggle is, then, like Rancière’s ignorant schoolmaster, who commands the student to learn material that the teacher does not know (see Bingham & Biesta, 2010).

At the time of Lenin's writings one of the problems that the mass struggle imposed regarded sustaining the struggle in the face of repression, and the answer to this problem was the secretive organization. This type of organization was—and remains—at odds with the obsession for “democracy.” Within the Party, “broad democracy... is nothing more than a *useless and harmful toy* (pp. 160-161). Broad democracy has several harmful effects: it

will simply facilitate the work of the police in making big raids, it will... divert the thoughts of the practical workers from the serious and imperative task of training themselves to become professional revolutionaries to that of drawing up detailed “paper” rules for election systems. (p. 161)

Broad democracy leads to broad arrests, to broad repression—at least in the context of the Tsarist state. Depending upon the degree of state repression, that is, the Party must uphold a respective degree of secrecy, hand centralization. This organizational priority of “strict secrecy, strict selection of members and training of professional revolutionaries,” Lenin insists, actually guarantees “something more than ‘democracy’... namely, complete, comradely, mutual confidence among revolutionaries” (p. 162). Lenin thus emphasizes that what is important is not the formality of democratic mechanisms but the spirit of comradeship and dedication to the struggle. Secrecy and the careful selection of membership protect Party leaders and members from police raids and infiltration.

Lenin also addresses the ways in which the centralized Party mediates between the local and the national scales. He addresses the objection that the centralization of the Party will move the center of struggles to the national level. He dismisses this objection outright, arguing, “our movement in the past few years has suffered precisely from the fact that the local workers have been too absorbed in local work” (p. 164). This absorption has created unnecessary additional labor, unnecessary because it is redundant. Lenin gives as an example the publication apparatuses of different localities. Instead of various local organizations independently publishing newspapers, this work could be consolidated in a national apparatus. This apparatus of the Party would train “a staff of expert writers, expert correspondents, an army of Social-Democratic reporters that has established contacts far and wide” (p. 169). Local issues would also thereby be placed within a broader (national or international) context, thereby contributing to the development of revolutionary consciousness.

It is important to emphasize that Lenin in no way fetishizes the Party-form. Nor does he issue blanket, abstract organizational imperatives about secrecy, the selection of membership, hierarchy, or centralization. Lenin's theorization of the Party emerged from the particular coordinates in which he and the communist movement were operating, and he proposed the Party-form as an organizational apparatus that would be able to meet the challenges posed at the moment. The Party, that is, was conceived as an organism that would ensure the proletariat's victory on the battlefield. This victory requires revolutionary consciousness, theory, and organization. It also requires discipline.

Lukàcs: The Party, Discipline, and Full Subjectivity

Lenin conceived of the party as an organizational organism appropriate to wage combat against the systems and agents of capitalism and imperialism, Lukàcs (1971; 1924/2008) argues that the Party is ultimately a *theoretical* question. He contends that the Party is not just a

technical response to the problems of struggles, it is rather “one of the most important *intellectual* questions of the revolution” (Lukàcs, 1971, p. 295). For Lukàcs, the entirety of this intellectual question hinges on the notion of discipline. Indeed, the particularly Leninist form of the Party did emerge as a real force in the communist movement in this context at the 2nd Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party Conference in Brussels and London. The thrust of the debate during this congress, which resulted in the split of the Party between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, was over the requirements of Party membership. Julius Martov held that Party membership should require that the member be *associated* with one of the Party organizations, while Lenin believed that members must *participate* in Party activity directly, supporting the Party materially and personally, and ultimately submitting to the discipline of the Party—even when the member disagrees with the Party. Lenin’s proposition won, hence the formation of the Bolshevik—or *majoritarian*—tendency.

As Lukàcs (1924/2008) declares, the Leninist position was that “it was essential for members to take part in illegal activity, to devote themselves wholeheartedly to party work, and to submit to the most rigorous party discipline” (p. 25). And *this* is the crux of the whole debate and the whole purpose of the Party itself: “Other questions of organization—that of centralization, for instance—are *only the necessary technical consequences of this... Leninist standpoint*” (ibid., emphasis added). For Lukàcs, then, the relationship that the Party institutes in the revolutionary mass movement is not between spontaneity and organization, but between spontaneity and discipline. Why is discipline necessary? Because the Party is nothing except the vehicle for working-class power in the revolutionary period, and revolutions are *events*, they are necessary confusing, chaotic, and unpredictable. This is the case for two main reasons: first, because of the varying social and class forces that participate in revolutions and, second, because of the complicated nature of the composition of the proletarian class itself.

Rarely—if ever—do crises affect only one strata of society. Because of the interconnected and tightly woven nature of the social fabric, even when one sector of the economy undergoes a loss in productivity other sectors are affected. This was evidenced quite clearly in the major economic crisis of 2007-2008, the shadows of which still loom over us today. The crisis began with a bust in the housing market but quickly spread throughout all of the international economy. It impacted the poorest workers most deeply—and workers of color in particular—but it also impacted well-paid workers (known as the “middle class”), the petit bourgeoisie (like the owners of family businesses), and corporations of all sizes. If a revolution erupted in response to this crisis, what would its class character be? The Leninist answer is: it would be of the class that was the most disciplined, organized, and conscious. “The deeper the crisis,” Lukàcs writes, “the better the prospects for the revolution. But also... the more strata of society it involves, the more varied are the instinctive movements which criss-cross in it” (p. 29).

Within the proletarian class—which encompasses all those who must sell their labor-power for a wage to survive—there is a great deal of difference. The Leninist Party studies its own class, gaining a “deeper and more thorough appreciation of the different economic shadings within the proletariat” (p. 27). While capitalism evened out differences within the proletariat—by, for example, deskilling labor processes—the advent of imperialism created new divisions within it, enabling some workers to attain better living standards, those comparable to the petit-bourgeoisie. Lukàcs is here referring to the labor aristocracy, which arises in imperialist countries when the bourgeoisie buys off certain workers from “enormous *superprofits* (since they

are obtained over and above the profits that the capitalists squeeze out of the workers of their ‘own’ country (Lenin, 1917/1975, p. 9). The labor aristocracy aligns itself with the bourgeoisie, and this alignment allows “a superiority in formal education and experience in administration over the rest of the proletariat” (Lukàcs, 1924/2009, p. 28) through, for example, the occupation of leadership roles in unions. It is generally those members of the proletarian class who ideologically align themselves most with the bourgeoisie who occupy positions of authority—there is thus a material incentive to supporting bourgeois ideology. Not only ideology, but “the proletariat is still caught up in the old capitalist forms of thought and feeling” (Lukàcs, 1971, p. 310). Without the constant work of the Party there won’t exist a sufficiently strong counter, or proletarian, ideology and structure of feeling. As a result, “the revolutionary instinct of the workers, which explodes from time to time in great spontaneous mass actions, is... unable to preserve such instinctive heights of active class-consciousness” (Lukàcs, 1924/2009, p. 29).

Discipline is thus necessary in and before the time of insurrection. The Party member submits to the will of the Party, but this will is not some abstract program, it’s a living, breathing organism of which the member is a full part. The member and the Party do not relate in a reified way; it is not as if the organization “is divided into an active and a passive group” (Lukàcs, 1971, p. 318). Instead, the Party requires “active participation in every event,” and this “can only be achieved by engaging the whole personality” (p. 319). The Party engages the entirety of subjectivity, mobilizing all of the forces of intellect and desire, and in this way the Party is subjected to the discipline of the proletarian class. Lukàcs goes so far as to equate the “discipline of the Communist Party” to “the unconditional absorption of the total personality in the praxis of the movement” (p. 320). This relationship is the key to the Communist Party, and without it membership “degenerate[s] into a reified and abstract system of rights and duties” (ibid.). Thus, we here see Lukàcs affirming and developing Lenin’s critique of the formal mechanisms of democracy, which Lukàcs would refer to as reifying, reducing social relationships and the total personality to ballots and election systems.

When the revolutionary moment happens there is nothing to guarantee either that a revolution will take hold or that the revolution will be of a progressive nature. Revolutionary moments are, by their very essence, when everything is up in the air; “Social power lies abandoned in the street, without an owner so to speak. A restoration only becomes possible in the absence of any revolutionary class to take advantage of this ownerless power” (p. 308). Restoration is one possibility, and counterrevolution is another; there is always the possibility that even more reactionary forces, like fascists or white supremacists, can seize hold of this ownerless power. The purpose of the Party is to prepare for the revolutionary moment so that it is prepared to seize that moment, to navigate the twists and turns as it unfolds, and to ensure that the advanced sections of the proletariat are doing the steering.

Dean: The Party and Revolutionary Lack

There is a misconception that the Party is the all-knowing being. As shown above, however, as Lenin formulates it the Party is the student of the revolution. Lukàcs also disputes this misconception, and the uncertainty of revolution—including the path to revolution—is what necessitates discipline and, by extension, the Party. But it is Dean who most astutely dwells on the opacity of the Party, defining it as a radical lack and a radical desire. The Communist Party,

for Dean (2012), “is a vehicle for maintaining a specific gap of desire, the collective desire for collectivity” (p. 207).

There is no shortage of critiques of neoliberalism and its effect of subjectivity; how it transforms “citizens” into “consumers” and how it vilifies collectivity and presents the individual, autonomous, rational subject as the only ontological option for being. This is capitalist subjectification, the ways in which we are produced as individuals (see Ford, 2013). We are radically divided from others. Against this stands communist desire, our desire for a “collective, a common relation to a common condition of division” (p. 191). This entails subordinating the individual to the collective and, citing Lukàcs (1971), Dean argues that this ultimately means “the renunciation of individual freedom” (p. 315). This renunciation and “subordination requires discipline, work, and organization... it is active collective struggle that changes and reshapes desire from its individual... form into a common, collective one” (Dean, 2012, p. 197). It helps that this is “an imaginary individuality” (p. 195) that is more ideological than actual. And it doesn’t mean that we don’t have bodily integrity or autonomy, it just means that our desire is collective—and that we desire collectivity.

There is another gap that desire animates, and that is the gap within the existing order of things, what Rancière terms the “part of those who have no part.” This is a form of subjectification that the Party animates; it is an “us,” but not an “us” that we can fully and finally delineate. Dean gives an excellent, concrete example of this subjectification: “We are the 99%,” the main slogan of Occupy Wall Street. This slogan doesn’t name “an identity,” it “highlights a division and a gap, the gap between the wealth of the top 1 percent and the rest of us” (p. 200). The slogan is a subjectification of the division between the people and the system without unifying the people as homogenous. That is, “We are the 99%” mobilizes a common identity but it does not “unify this collectivity under a substantial identity—race, ethnicity, nationality. It asserts it as the ‘we’ of a divided people, the people divided between expropriators and expropriated” (ibid.); it expresses a collective desire for collective being, belonging, and producing.

Dean thinks Occupy Wall Street and the Party together, arguing that Occupy Wall Street *both* designates the need for the Party *and* provides us with a model and example of the Party in embryonic form. The overthrow and dissolution of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc socialist countries impacted a shift in the forces of social movements in the U.S., resulting in the rise of anarchist and liberal groupings. This new composition was most evident in the anti- or alter-globalization protests of 1999-2001. Coinciding with post-structuralist and post-modern philosophies that celebrated difference against unity and the local against the universal, protest movements turned toward concepts of “diversity, horizontality, individuality, inclusivity, and openness (where openness actually means the refusal of divisive ideological content)” (p. 208). Occupy Wall Street began with many of the values associated with anarchism: horizontality, leaderlessness, inclusion, autonomy, and consensus. Yet Dean argues that these created “conflicts and disillusionment within the movement” (p. 210). She continues:

Emphases on autonomy encouraged people to pursue multiple, separate, and even conflicting goals rather than work toward common ones. Celebration of horizontality heightened skepticism toward organizing structures like the General Assembly and the Spokes Council, ultimately leading to the dissolution of both.

Assertions of leaderlessness as a principle incited a kind of paranoia around leaders who emerged but could not be acknowledged or held accountable as leaders. (p. 210)

The *ideals* celebrated at the beginning of the movement turned out, in the practical experience of the movement, to be nothing more than ideals. Nice thoughts, yes, but not sufficient for the task at hand. Thus instead of solving the problem of organization it raised the question yet again, moving us to think seriously about the Party-form.

The momentum of Occupy “comes from a vanguard of disciplined, committed activists undertaking and supporting actions in the streets” (p. 216). It was very much a matter, I would argue of “from each according to their ability.” Not everyone was able to stay at an occupation day and night, people would come and go in between work, school, and other family or community commitments. Some people would just show up for the General Assemblies or for protests, marches, and direct actions. But Dean notes that Occupy, like the Party, subsumed the whole of subjectivity and disciplined itself to the movements and desires of the 99 percent. Dean writes, “people joined in different capacities—facilitation, legal, technology, media, food, community relations, education, direct action—participating in time-intensive working groups and support activities” (p. 217). In this way, Occupy possessed “the ability to draw together all party members and to involve them in activity on behalf of the party *with the whole of their personality*” (Lukàcs, 1971, p. 335).

Further, Occupy insisted on the gap that animates politics. Dean (2012) argues against those who have read in the movement the “multiplicity of the 99 percent’s incompatible groups and tendencies,” as if Occupy was “a kind of political or even post-political open-source brand that anyone can use” (pp. 219-220). This analysis completely misses the point: it was an occupation and a movement *against the 1 percent*. It wasn’t just some agglomeration of bodies in the streets, but a united movement that insisted on *division*. Thus, those who celebrate the movement for its inclusiveness are also wrong: “That aspect of the movement... isn’t new or different. It’s a component of Occupy that is *fully compatible* with the movement’s setting in communicative capitalism” (p. 223). Think about it: what is there that capitalism doesn’t want to include? Even radical Islamists like the al-Nusra Front and the Islamic State in the Levant (ISIL) have been accommodated some space within the current capitalism order, being supplied weapons and training—directly and indirectly—by imperialist forces. Occupy was threatening because it was *exclusive*: it excluded the exploiters.

Although many wouldn’t admit it, Occupy was a form of representation and leadership. It was a vanguard of people—a part—standing in for the whole:

Occupy Wall Street is not *actually* the movement of 99 percent of the population of the United States... against the top 1 percent. It is a movement mobilizing itself around an occupied Wall Street *in the name of* the 99 percent. (p. 229)

The movement asserted and claimed this gap, this lack of correspondence between the exploiters and the exploited. The problem, however, is that it never admitted as much. Just like it never admitted that leaders did emerge. This refusal made it so that we couldn’t address questions like *who* was leading and speaking for the movement and *what* do we want them to say?

Nonetheless, Occupy Wall Street still functioned in many ways similar to the Party: absorbing the full subjectivity of members, insisting on division, and drawing people into the struggle; it was “a self-conscious assertion of the overlap of two gaps in the maintenance of collective desire” (p. 239). One reason that Dean’s analysis is so useful is that it is a compelling strategy for persuasion. Instead of referring to those Communist Parties that we have been—through the media and education—so indoctrinated to despise, we can start by pointing out how Occupy Wall Street proved to be a Party in embryonic form. At the time, it couldn’t admit as much to itself, and this refusal is precisely one of the reasons for its dissolution.

Conclusion

If critical education wants to settle for reforms within capitalism, for striving for a return to the “public education” of the Keynesian era, then there is no need to consider the Party. If all we want to do is restore funding to pre-1979 levels, stop school closings and privatizations, make textbooks a little more progressive, work for greater equity in terms of race, ability, gender, sexuality, nationality, and so on, then this article is mere fodder for academic debate. There are, to be sure, strands of critical education that do want this. Henry Giroux’s project, for example, is to expand the public sphere. Giroux (2011) writes that his view of critical education—specifically critical pedagogy—is useful for “gainful employment” and “creating the formative culture of beliefs, practices, social relations that enable individuals to... learn how to govern, and nurture a democratic society that takes equality, justice, shared values, and freedom seriously” (p. 4). Critical education for those like Giroux is “necessary to affirm public values, inspire the social imagination, and sustain democratic institutions” (p. 165). Bourgeois political parties are completely sufficient for Giroux’s project, which is representative of the liberal wing of critical education.

If, however, we want to overthrow capitalism, if we want to wage a war against imperialism and its agents, if we want to completely reimagine and reorganize education as part of the struggle for an entirely new set of social relations and an entirely new mode of production, then we have to take the Party seriously. The ruling class is no less organized, no less class conscious, no less disciplined, and no less dedicated to maintaining its rule than it was in Lenin’s time. That is not to say that everything is the same as it was in Russia in 1902, of course. The starkest difference is that today in bourgeois democracies the need for secrecy and illegality is completely different. Today the formulation and distribution of propaganda can be carried out in the open, and people can openly identify themselves as members of the Party (these conditions can always change, however).

Revolutions are unpredictable. There is no guarantee of when the revolutionary rupture will take place or where it will begin. There is no guarantee that reactionary forces, like fascists or racists, will not seize the moment of insurrection or that it the moment will not be quickly reabsorbed into the capitalist mode of production. The Party doesn’t know when the revolution will happen, and it doesn’t *make* the revolution. The Party does, however, take for granted “*the fact—the actuality—of the revolution*” (Lukàcs, 1924/2009, p. 26). The Party does so in all of revolution’s uncertainty, chaos, and unpredictability. It is, after all, “an organization situated at the overlap of two lacks, the openness of history as well as its own non-knowledge” (Dean, 2012, p. 242). The Party’s whole *raison d’être* is that the revolutionary moment will come, that we

can't know when, where, why, or how it will come and what will happen, but we have to prepare for it nonetheless.

Critical educators can contribute to building the Party in several concrete ways. First, we can re-start Freire's project of thinking through the pedagogical aspects of the Party and its relationship with the masses, which will necessarily entail moving beyond Freire. Second, we can relate to our trade unions as Party members, striving to advance spontaneity and its forms of consciousness to revolutionary levels. One concrete way that this can happen is by fighting national chauvinism, or what Mayssoun Sukarieh and Stuart Tannock (2010) have termed "labor imperialism" in our unions.⁷ Third, we can orient our research (or, if you will, propaganda) in relation to the totality of social relations of production. We can do this not only in our academic articles, but also in all of our writings and communications in our various social struggles.⁸ Through this work we can link our movements against, for example, school closings in our communities to U.S. imperialism. Fourth, we can use our skills and experiences as *teachers* to teach others how to teach. We can, in other words, take our trade and bring it to bear on the Party and, by extension, the movement as a whole, thereby disciplining the Party to our full subjectivity, our "total personality."

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⁷ Sukarieh and Tannock are referring to the ongoing cooperation between the American Federation of Teacher's and the U.S. State Department and other organizations of imperialism—like the National Endowment for Democracy—in promoting U.S. hegemony in the Middle East.

⁸ Hussain and Stern (2015) provide instructive lessons on how we might generate our own coverage of educational events by turning to the newspapers of the Black Panther Party and the Nation of Islam. (Interestingly—but not surprisingly—the authors don't mention that the Black Panther Party was a Leninist Party and that the Nation of Islam takes organizational inspiration from the Leninist Party).

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