

Review

Peter McLaren, (2015) *Pedagogy of Insurrection*, New York: Peter Lang. 465 pp., Paperback, ISBN 1433128969, £ 20.98.

When Stalin and the Politburo of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union saw Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth* at the Moscow Bolshoi Theatre in 1936 they got so upset and finally outraged that the opera was crushed and condemned the next morning in the Party's official newspaper Pravda. The second blast came a decade or so later in the Zhdanov Resolution, in which the famous composer was accused of rotten formalism. Shostakovich learnt the hard lesson and thereafter composed his symphonies - so to speak - for Stalin and the Politburo. Eventually he was forced to join the Communist Party and pretend to follow its doctrines.

Professor Peter McLaren is an opposite to Shostakovich, although he, too, creates textual symphonies with his pen, for he has made his own way and it became his way despite the little Stalins of academia that tried to crush him along his revolutionary journey. For over four decades he has been one of North America's top figures in the field of critical theory in general and critical pedagogy in particular. He has developed the tradition of critical pedagogy in the belly of the beast and has been an outspoken critic of the state of the capitalist world without limiting his presence to the US debate. Through his works and travels he has created a forceful and influential global voice.

One consequence of his work in the global arena has been, especially in the past two decades, that critical pedagogy has gained significant momentum as a key area in educational research and various educational practices around the world. Perhaps the best indication of McLaren's international influence is that critical pedagogy is nowadays a globally recognized movement.

Throughout the pages of *Pedagogy of Insurrection* McLaren demonstrates that in his new and inspiring academic atmosphere at Chapman University he has not only

reached his strongest and most creative phase but also begun to carve out a new theoretical terrain with his pulsating style of writing. The first five chapters are McLaren's reflections with his intellectual "comrades" in the following order: Jesus of Nazareth, Paulo Freire, Hugo Chávez, Fidel Castro and Ernesto 'Che' Guevara. All of them were socialist leaders with both theoretical and practical qualities, and also prophets of social justice with their own personal agendas, ideas and ideals. What McLaren shows us is that each one of them has something important to offer to critical thinking and action today. The rest of the chapters range from ecopedagogy to music education as variants of his 'revolutionary critical pedagogy'. Two of them are lively interviews with his Slovenian and Croatian interlocutors.

As McLaren notes, the book is not a typical volume on critical pedagogy in that it associates his developments in critical pedagogy with Christian communism, 'critical spirituality and various incarnations of liberation theology' (p. 46). In this book he is especially interested in theorizing—and emphasizing their communion—the ideas of building a community and developing a philosophy of *praxis* as means to criticize and overcome global capitalist forces.

As a skilled anthropologist and theorist of education he can smoothly link his street level observations from around the world with references to historical and current political affairs, as well as to personal reflections and theoretical notions of Marxist humanism, revolutionary critical pedagogy and Christian socialism. In using and comparing the vocabularies of critical pedagogy and Christian socialism McLaren has developed a new language and *praxis* of education aiming at building a 'Kingdom of God' on earth in the name of radical equality and social justice.

The book is not easy to classify for the librarian: at the same time as it is an essay of singular quality on the theory of critical education it is also a memoir, a manifesto and a poem. It resembles a symphony in how it uses language variations as instruments and how each section has a specific rhythm and cadence as the reader transitions from one section to another. The last chapter, which is reminiscent of Allen Ginsberg's famous poem, Howl, even has the tempo written in Italian for the reader to follow.

Sections of the last chapter - Critical Rage Pedagogy - appear to be designed as a performance or at least to be read aloud.

McLaren's provocative and experimental text is a lesson in creative writing—how to compose a multilayered academic text, how to keep the focus on the main themes, and how to get the attention of the global critical audience. I would not be surprised if some of the most mean spirited academic brokers in the field of education take on the role of an academic Politburo as they read and condemn McLaren's symphonic masterpiece. But those who have not become deaf to the voices and screams from the planet's slums, let them be the final judge.

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