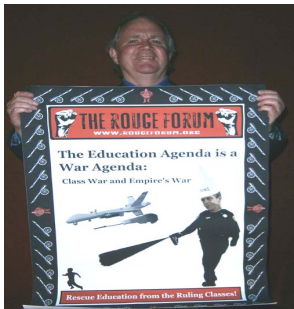


RCP Interview series**An interview with Dr. Rich Gibson**

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	<p>Rich Gibson, PhD, is professor emeritus at San Diego State University and an adjunct professor at Southwestern College in southern San Diego. Gibson is a co-founder, with Professor Wayne Ross from UBC of the radical activist education-based Rouge Forum. He was a regional organizer for SDS. A former iron foundry worker, Gibson helped organize what is now the largest local in the United Auto Workers Union. As a school union organizer, Gibson led repeated, usually illegal, school strikes. The constant in his life—organizing for a mass, class conscious, integrated group to transcend capital and empire. RG@richgibson.com</p>
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Bülent Avcı:

A quote from your personal website goes "*what makes good teachers struggle every day to swim upstream against the school systems that rarely reward them*". I might be wrong but based on my teaching experience, neoliberal education policy, and implementations-NAR, NCLB and RTT have almost whipped out "good teachers who would swim upstream against oppressive education system". Teachers especially new generations have become some sort of technicians who do as being told; no more no less. Today's teachers have no academic freedom, no authority, and no autonomy. Do you think a teacher can still be a good teacher who can swim upstream?

Rich Gibson:

Yes, I do... It is very difficult in K-12, but I know Marxist teachers who are thriving. They have been at it for a long time, have tenure, know the contract better than the bosses, know the kids and the community, never discriminate against disagreement. Of course, they have been in trouble, and are isolated from the Taylorized teachers you note, those who don't know how to teach without a regimented curriculum, without high stakes exams and, indeed, without fear. In colleges and universities, opportunism abounds. Professors tend to be like monks, alone in their little cubicles, protecting their own very valuable "specialty," (gimmick) from others... Having worked for the National Education Association as an organizer for years, I know that nobody on staff wanted to be assigned to organize profs.... Even with all those degrees, few figure out that they are deeply involved in class war and empire (adjuncts vs full timers vs bosses, intelligence and military agencies all over the campuses, etc.) So, most profs serve as key buffers for the ruling classes: financial, industrial, and agricultural elites.

Even so, about 25 years ago, a group of us, mostly profs and k12 teachers, created the Rouge Forum which, over time, involved thousands of school workers at all levels, parents, and students. We connected theory (there is no line in the RF, but there is a lot of Marxism) to activist practice.

We disrupted fake "professional" conferences. We published high-stakes exams before they were given. We had mass conferences that brought hundreds of school workers together--we became a community. We published in academic and popular journals. We wrote books. We traveled the world exhorting for class conscious struggle. We mentored younger scholars, got them tenure. We developed very close personal ties--comrades. Children were born, friends died. We fought racism at every turn. So, yes, there are still openings, cracks, in the empire. The RF persists.

Bülent Avcı:

In educational literature, we often encounter terms like *equity, social justice, diversity, inclusion, anti-racist curriculum*, etc. These concepts used to be mostly associated with the left-wing (or perhaps Marxist) worldview in 1960-the 70s. But today it seems that they became neoliberal narratives that are full of hypocrisy and manipulation. Without a sociopolitical revolution or reform, educational “reforms” have not gone beyond a neoliberal public-relation game. Can /should critical pedagogy scholars reclaim these concepts and redefine them from a revolutionary perspective?

Rich Gibson:

Too often, people use the term "neo-liberalism" to avoid saying capitalism and imperialism. So, I will stick with the latter two.

Let me shift the dialog a bit, however. Some of those terms you mention are prevalent in what became known as Critical Pedagogy whose most famous proponent was Paulo Freire.

Critical Pedagogy is not class conscious pedagogy... It is opposed to class conscious pedagogy. That is true in Freire's own history. He worked in Brazil with Dom Halder Camera, who was trying to build Catholic base communities to ward off growing communist movements. Freire later plagiarized a lot of Camera's work (see "The Texts of Paulo Freire" by Paul Taylor).

Freire was a revolutionary wherever he wasn't and liberal wherever he was. When he returned to Brazil from a plush form of what he called "exile," he went to work for the hack Lula and complained about the school buildings, not the core of instruction. Revolution was off the table. In that interim exile, he worked for the not-terribly radical World Council of Churches. He built an opportunistic little publishing cult around himself, then insisted, too much, on his own humility.

He sought to mix Che, Lenin, Mao, and others—add postmodernism, uncritically... Stupid... His last wife is/was a gutter racist... He claimed to “invent” a teaching method that probably predated Socrates...

He is a dead end.

But the careers of many who fashioned his publishing cult followed a path that is now transparent. They went from very thin Marxism to postmodernism in all forms to, now, Democrats. In their postmodern stage, when that religion with an angry cloak was at the height of trendiness, they got high-paying tenured jobs at big-time universities, where they now

parade their counterfeit radicalism in front of rich students. I know some of these (mostly white) men well. I witnessed them organize their writing and patter for presentations. They're oozing fistulas of dishonesty and opportunism.

Some of these "scholars" leaped on the identity politics bandwagon, promoting "intersectionality" which elevates every sex/gender, race, nationality, language grouping, to the same level (and really a higher level) as class.

It's another anti-communist hustle, which gives jobs to the upper middle class sector of given parts of truly oppressed people. The carefully carved out Ethnic Studies departments, the enriching consulting positions, all this allows them a veneer of radicalism, while they make sure people are divided and ruled, and the dollars keep rolling.

A good example is Nicole Hannah Jones and the New York Times "1619 Project." Jones, harkening back to the American Eugenics Society, claims racism is "in the DNA of white people," and that the American Revolution was waged solely to preserve slavery---denying the entire history of the Enlightenment. Fortunately, prominent historians like Gordon Wood attacked the Project--but it is still being promoted in schools all over the US.

As Georg Lukacs observed, "the obfuscating and disordering of the social sciences in the imperialist age proceeded largely along the lines of racial theory (race replacing class)."

Lukacs, Georg. *The Destruction of Reason*, 1952. Accessed September 13, 2021. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lukacs/works/destruction-reason/ch03.htm>.

Should Class Conscious educators teach Marx, revolutionary theory and practice--dialectical materialism? Yes, of course, and in history and the social sciences, it is pretty easy... Saying good things about Marx in a California k12 classroom is illegal, it's in the statutes, but I know people who do it all the time.

Bülent Avcı:

Some scholars argue that traditional public schooling (K-12) within capitalist societies outlived its mission. Elites (or ruling classes) have been trying to redefine education and schooling in economic terms and get rid of the democratic mission of schools (perhaps get rid of public schools completely). To what extent would you agree or disagree?

Rich Gibson:

These are not democratic schools. They never were. They are capitalist schools serving the empire. They are segregated by class and race (in the main)... Since the war in Vietnam was won by the Vietnamese, US elites have moved systematically to regain control of the military, the political world, the economy, the Presidency, and, clearly, the schools. From Nation at Risk to No Child Left Behind, to Race to the Top and all in between, they steadily regimented the curriculum, attached that to high-stakes tests (measuring class, race, etc) and that to merit pay, school closings, etc. It is educational Taylorism.

History is largely eradicated in US schools, especially the history of the flight from Vietnam (parallel now to Afghanistan).

Let us first be clear about the nature of the US government--with the 2008 bailouts, it became, full blown, an executive committee and armed weapon of the rich. Schools in the US are arms of that government. There is no single public school system in the US. There are five or six: Pre-Walmart worker in Detroit and Compton (also pre-prison), Pre-teacher, social worker in Del Cerro, San Diego, Pre-doctor, lawyer in La Jolla, CA. And pre-ruling class in the many elite (now fully integrated) private schools which the likes of Mitt Romney and the Bush family attended. I went to one of these ruling class k12 schools on a scholarship--class traitor. There is nothing unusual about elites picking off some children of the poor, educating them, and turning them back on their "own" populations. The church does that all the time.

Elite grads move on next to and Yale. Daniel Ellsberg went to the same school I attended... Money, capital, beats down the door of every schoolroom. Every child in California is worth a fixed amount per year, now over \$10,000. That money is prorated hour by hour. Teachers have to keep track. When kids are absent, the money is deducted.

Think of the sale of textbooks, developers and architects and buildings, the cost of busses. Schools are huge markets in themselves.

For much more on this see

<https://www.counterpunch.org/2016/08/16/why-have-school-blood-and-money-versus-reason/>

I know scholars of times gone by have suggested that "public" schools be abolished. Ivan Illich comes to mind. But this is silly. "Public schools" are no more going to be abolished than the military.

Anyone serious about social change will need to work in, organize in, both. And, in both, the crux is the fight for ideas, Marxist ideas, which can defeat

men with guns--as both the peasant nationalist ideas of the Vietnamese, and the radical ideas of US troops against the war, demonstrate.

Bülent Avcı:

There has been an ongoing discussion over if critical race theory (CRT) should be part of the nation's education system or not. While critical (left-wing) educators should struggle against right-wing narratives on this matter, would it be wrong to say that critical pedagogy researchers should have some reservations for CRT? A theory that ignores historical and dialectical relation between racism and capitalism; it reduces racism to a problem of white individuals which resonates with neoliberal stance in this matter. CRT, one way or another, pits black poor-working class people against white poor-working class people (poor-white students against poor-black students). Would it be too harsh to consider CRT as a petit-bourgeois ideology?

Rich Gibson:

I think I dealt with CRT above. But, yes, it is a petit-bourgeois ideology.

Bülent Avcı:

Critical pedagogy scholars teach in neoliberal universities; at the same time, they are critical of neoliberalism? It must be very difficult for scholars to work this way. What are the major problems today CP academics face and have to cope with?

Rich Gibson:

Again, I know there are class-conscious scholars teaching in capitalist schools of the empire. Some of them think of themselves as practitioners of Critical Pedagogy, many don't. They're reds, Marxists. They face the

usual divide and rule tricks of administrators, isolation from monk-like colleagues, and, depending on where they are, criticism, sometimes attacks, from students. In my experience, truly elites university students aren't bothered by Marxists much. They simply assume they will win. Occasionally, a few adopt and sustain class conscious action.

Students in poor and working class schools (and prisons) like Marxism, rarely reject class conscious education out of hand--unless they are deeply embedded in, for example, the Nation of Islam or some similar sect.

My experience is, of course, limited to my jobs, but I found upper middle-class students to be vehemently opposed to Marxist pedagogy as it threatens all they hope for, inside the system, and sometimes it demonstrates to them than many in their classroom won't "make it" as they believed... I've never had a problem with religious students-except the NOI and Zionists.

Bülent Avcı:

There is this recent series in Netflix-**The Chair**, which seems trying to unpack the collapse of the Western higher education system thanks to neoliberalism. Have you seen it? If so, do you think the show oversimplifies the situation or it reveals the neoliberal crisis in universities?

Rich Gibson:

Sorry, I haven't seen it.

Bülent Avcı:

Neoliberal advocacy groups have been promoting STEM education. How should we understand STEM campaigns? Could this be another tactical move of the neoliberal colonization of education?

Rich Gibson:

Stem wipes out history. Sure, it is part of the increased use of Taylorism in capitalist schools of the empire. But combine STEM with the bankrupt curricula, high stakes exams, carrot and stick teaching--and the US has created a couple of generations who have learned not to be curious, and worse, not to like to learn--future cannon fodder. I will add that it is not difficult to demonstrate to these students, "someone probably stole your education: steal it back. It is a matter of life and death. Ask the vets in the class."

Bülent Avcı:

Neoliberal ideology has shaped education over the last 30-40 years. Some think that neoliberal ideology outlived and will soon disappear. And others disagree saying that as long as opponents of neoliberal ideology have no viable alternatives at local, regional, and global levels, neoliberal hegemony in education will not go away. What do you think about this matter?

Rich Gibson:

We will differ on the matter of neo-liberalism. What is rising is fascism, as a more and more popular mass movement. Fascism is a social structure, not merely a person. I wrote long ago "What is fascism?" I think that holds up. <https://richgibson.com/fascism.html> What the Trump phenomenon has done is unleash a latent fascist mob. Armed violence is acceptable now, as

are racism, sexism, anti-science fanaticism, hyper-nationalism, old and new forms of superstition, and sheer hysteria.

The pandemic re-doubled the Trump effect.

Even before Trump, in the Obama era, I wrote that Americans were in the midst of a mass hysterical conversion crisis--ignorant of the wars, history, mystified about the underpinnings of inequality, gorging themselves in spectacles and consumption.

With a consumer economy, all are pitted against all in matters of exchange--different from an industrial economy where the necessity of solidarity becomes obvious.

The Democrats remain enablers of fascist structures with their diversionary promises about national health care, debt forgiveness, nicer cops, housing for all--guarantees that never materialize while the military is overfed, year-by-year. Biden's performance in the pandemic, forcing people on the death marches back to school and work, is more evidence that the capitalist parties of the empire will murder millions in order to preserve profiteering. These maneuvers, however, are not sustainable. Inflation, mass illness, climate disasters, resignations, wildcat strikes, over time lead to financial crises, collapse... I have no crystal ball, can't predict the form of collapse, but repeated financial debacles indicate a shattered economy ahead.

How do elites solve financial collapses? They can give people loans--but not to indebted people who have no jobs, or minimum wage jobs. They can try to pump consumption, but they run into the same barrier. They can run speed-ups, stretch ours, cut wages, lay off, and still they cannot wiggle out of crises of overproduction.

Or they can have a war, perhaps several wars, destroying the built-up backlogs, and restarting the cycle of gathering surplus value from desperate laborers.

What does this mean for students and school workers? It means schools will continue their service to rulers--fashion loyalty and obedience, submissiveness, indifference, new generations of warriors and spies, promote adoration of flags and bosses, habituation to hierarchy, while keeping the secret of all tyrants--they live in fear. The core issue of our time is the reality of booming color-coded inequality and the promise of perpetual war met by the potential of a mass, integrated, internationalist, class-conscious movement for equality and justice. With that as a grand strategy, school workers and students will need to develop their own creative strategies and tactics.

Bülent Avcı:

On behalf of RCP, thank you for your time and support

Rich Gibson:

Thank you