

## PREFACE

### The Morning after Prague

The mass media discovered a new phrase in 1999—‘anti-capitalism’ ... They were painfully discovering something very real. Ten years after the supposed final triumph of market capitalism with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the USSR, a growing number of people were rejecting their system (Chris Harman, *Anti-capitalism: theory and practice*, 2000, p. 3).

World trade is the mechanism allowing poor countries to start taking care of very basic needs. (Bill Gates, in Barkham, 2000).

UPDATE 19:50 (26<sup>th</sup> September 2000, Prague): The Opera has been cancelled due to ‘unforeseen circumstances.’ ... UPDATE 19:39 Delegates [of the IMF and World Bank] are going to the Opera Square where a big party is waiting for them, but three thousand protestors are already in the square. ... UPDATE (from Tel-Aviv): Reports of a completely successful shutdown of down-town Tel-Aviv are coming in. Demonstrators totally took over a square and held a moment of silence in solidarity with actions in Praha. ... UPDATE 18:43: Reports of mass arrests have begun. ... UPDATE 15:27: Demonstrators have broken through police lines around the convention center. More than 500 are directly outside the convention center. ... UPDATE 13:20: Reports of massive police violence from under the bridge to the convention center. Gas, spray, water cannons and other weapons are being used against people marching toward the convention center from the valley ... (Nasreen Karim, *Fighting back in Prague*, extracts of eyewitness report from Prague, PSN, 27<sup>th</sup> September: 00. 52).

The idea for a pamphlet on the significance of Seattle for education was first discussed at a Hillcole Group meeting held in February, 2000. For us, as radical left educators, it seemed that Seattle was a significant landmark regarding the struggle against reducing education to labour-power production, against the insertion of business interests into all sectors of education (schools, colleges, universities) and against privatisation of education. It became increasingly

apparent—especially after the groundbreaking work of Nico Hirtt (2000)—that the World Trade Organisation (WTO) through its Council for Trade in Services (CTS) was softening education up as a site for corporate competition. The ‘businessification’ of education (Benn and Chitty, 1999) that we discussed in our *Business, Business, Business: New Labour’s Education Policy* (Allen *et al.*, 1999) and at our Conference (of the same title) held in London in October 1999, clearly had a *global* dimension. Education was just another profit-making site, to be opened up to international capital by the WTO’s Council for Services. This pamphlet uncovers the WTO’s neo-liberal agenda for education.

The text of the pamphlet started life as the first three sections of a paper written for the Annual Conference of Socialist Economists 2000, ‘Global Capital and Global Struggles: strategies, alliances, alternatives’, held at the University of London Union in July (Rikowski, 2000a). Section 4 owes a lot to two papers presented at the recent British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, Cardiff University, in September (Rikowski, 2000b, c). Further, this pamphlet incorporates ideas and discussions from a number of Hillcole Group publications (especially Chitty, 1991; Hillcole Group, 1997; Allen *et al.*, 1999; and Hill, 1999), and from our meetings.

Seattle was not the first protest against one or more of the triad of organisations policing the world for international capital—the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the WTO. Peter McLaren (2000, p.26) points to the Second Ministerial Meeting in Geneva 1998, where 10,000 anti-WTO protestors were in evidence. Neither was Seattle the first recognisably ‘anti-capitalist’ mass protest (London’s Carnival Against Capital, of 18<sup>th</sup> June 1999, holds that honour). Yet Seattle was the biggest mass protest against one of the triad organisations, and, furthermore, for a significant number of the protestors, it was simultaneously *against capitalism* as a way of life. Seattle has, of course, been followed by Davos (World Economic Forum), Washington, May Day 2000, Melbourne and other protests against the triad organisations, or against what they stand for: the penetration of international capital into all areas of social life, neo-liberalism, and subservience to the law of money.

The Prague protest against the IMF and the World Bank going on at the time of writing is the latest in the line—and will not be the last. In a world where 7 million children die each year as a result of their country’s debt burden (Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, in Thomas, 2000), the complacency and pro-capitalist policies of the leading capitalist powers cannot be tolerated. In a world where every £1 given in Western aid to developing countries is matched by £13 returning to the creditor nations to service debt (*ibid.*), the anger that fuels anti-capitalist protests will continue. Seeing the writing on the wall, business may try to co-opt radical opponents; valuing them precisely for their

capacity to change public opinion (see Unilever's pathetic attempt to woo activist Naomi Klein, in Heur, 2000).

Eyewitness accounts from Prague (e.g. Karim, 2000) suggest that the mainstream media are seriously under-reporting what is happening there. It is clear that the media do not want to credit the protestors with any indication of success. On the contrary, Prague is being presented in the UK media as a tiresome, violent yet basically insignificant affair (as in reports by Anderson, 2000; and Huggler, 2000). In *The Times*, Prague is tucked away in a small article on page 19, with a single picture of two people in a cloud of tear gas (Paterson, 2000). The message seems to be 'this is not important, it's violent and unpleasant and these protestors are very sad people'—but even *The Times* cannot entirely hide the significance of Prague or the courage of the protestors. The mask slips in an article by Simon Jenkins reporting on Prime Minister Tony Blair's speech at the Labour Party Conference in Brighton yesterday (Jenkins, 2000). Near the end of the article, Jenkins notes that:

Politics in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has rid domestic government of any need for moral crusade. This may be no bad thing. But oh, the dullness of it all. The longer I listened to Mr Blair, the more I yearned to pack my rucksack and head for Wenceslas Square. There was the cockpit of the last modern revolution. There now is the cauldron of global change. It is in Prague, not in London or Brighton, that 10,000 policemen must protect the new supranational politicians, with their grants, backhanders, consultancies and construction rackets. There I could see myself smashing a few windows and grabbing a helmet or two. There is where the poor need a voice and the downtrodden a revolution. Forget Brighton.

The future will bring greater thrills than even Simon Jenkins can stand, though from the above I suspect that when pushed by a tide of solid and substantial victories for social transformation his penchant for dullness in life may win out.

Some elements within the mainstream media have presented possibilities for protest in Prague as a nuisance for the Czech people, using divide-and-rule formulas. Today, the UK press seems keen to remind us that many of Prague's inhabitants have simply fled the city (e.g. Anderson, 2000). An article in *Newsweek* argued that many young Eastern Europeans support globalisation and the 'cool' products and riches it promises (Lowry Miller, 2000). However, Sam Ashman (2000, p.8) shows that 20% unemployment in parts of Bohemia and eastern Moravia takes the shine off globalisation for many Czechs. A recently announced 43% increase in electricity prices, 27% increase in rents,

the exploitation of cheap labour, poverty and racism (especially against the Roma) indicate global capital is likely to bring benefits only to segments of the business and professional classes.

For radical Left educators, the transference of the magic of struggle against social injustice from Seattle to Prague forces us once more to rethink the role, nature and place of education within the mad social universe of capital. On the WTO's agenda for education uncovered in this pamphlet, it seems that education institutions, education research (increasingly becoming a dull appendage of the Labour administration's Department for Education and Employment) and education policy have lost their innocence. They are now part of a programme for incorporating all spheres of social life within the orbit of global capital. Educators are implicated in this process, like everyone else. The school or university is no hiding place.

The key point is what we do about it. The Battle in Seattle and its subsequent incarnations are reminders that educators are never off the hook until the need for further Seattles has been eradicated.