

# The BLACK C o M M e n t a t o r

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## **Compliance Is A Bitch! Accomplices at the "Edu-Factory" Represent Our Resistance By Dr. Lenore J. Daniels, PhD BC Editorial Board**

The working class did not expect miracles from the Commune. They had no ready-made utopias to introduce *par decret du peuple*. They know that in order to work out their own emancipation, and along with it that higher form to which present society is irresistibly tending by its own economical agencies, they will have to pass through long struggles, through a series of historic process, transforming circumstances and men.

-Karl Marx, from *The Civil War in France*

I do not want to become the accomplice of my torturers.

-Jean Amery, *At the Mind's Limits, Contemplations by A Survivor on Auschwitz and Its Realities*

Capitalism: It has only killed 1,000,000,000 people. But we made a lot of money and we're not going to share it.

-Socialist Party of America

The pursuit of skilled-labor took place on the job. Apprentice carpenters or electricians stood beside veteran workers at factories or workshops. Today, the university, once a bastion of Western

knowledge that distinguished the "elite" class from the working class, is the site where, thanks to capitalist's interests and the neo-liberal, collaborative support of willing administrators and faculty, new labor is disciplined to accept their material condition. These institutions of "higher learning," suggests post-doctorate fellow, Max Haiven, have become edu-factories.<sup>1</sup>

The university, as a Western institution, is far from the image of a marginalized, yet ethereal paradise of innocence, unless we remember the historical origins, in the U.S. of paradises of innocence. (If you do not remember, then you are the more likely to find yourself among the "blessed" or "free" sitting underneath its steeples and arches). As Haiven argues, from the medieval era on, the university proactively advantaged an agenda of its own: Western culture's superiority over all other cultures which, in turn, justified the pillage and plunder of colonized lands.

How did the universities respond to the "demands of workers" and the "threat of communist" after World War II? They compromised: The worker's share in the "American Dream" could hoist the whole family into the middle-class and a lifestyle that would include ownership of the latest production of appliances and, of course, the car and the television, and the home in suburbia. We will welcome your children, too!

The steeples and arches remained but doors at universities swung open!

The university, Haiven continues, came to be seen as a tool, not just for elites, but for the "public good." (Beware of the "fine print" or the visible or invisible signs!). Haiven points out the historical truth surrounding this perception of the universities as the site now for the "public good" - women, people of color, gays, and "Third world immigrants" should carry on - *in their proper places on the social ladder.*

In some ways and in some fields, Haiven says, the university shifted from the hands of conservative forces to the "very progressive." Here, Haiven suggests, the university, at this stage, reflects back to society what society should do. He argues that this "critical function" of the university is lost and "practically dead."

But what does the university reflect back to society except a mirror image of its undemocratic reality? Haiven admits so himself. Women

and people of color (and this description refers to people of darker hue, since whites, too, are comparatively paler color people) are not admitted What of the unemployed and impoverished?

*Does this idea of education incorporate a vision of freedom and democracy?*

The "critical function" of the university is problematic at its origins, which in the U.S. is not too surprising. If by "critical function" Haiven means the university began to serve as a guide for the creation of citizens and citizen engagement with their government and community, which I suspect he means, then, again, the university at this stage in which it sees itself as doing the "public good" is, in fact, producing citizens who are in pursuit of things, happiness through the acquisition of things and status. After all, this is the compromise the university offered "the working class."

Haiven continues. He argues that in the universities' shifts to neo-liberalism we now see yet another shift from public to semi-private institutions of higher learning. The university, he continues, is now out of reach for many.

But when it was no longer an establishment for the "elite" class to produce its future governmental, legal, judicial, social and cultural offspring, but an exclusive site for the "public good," was the university any more equalitarian if half the population of the country was excluded?

*Do we return to the university at this juncture?* If we do return to our collective history, we will recall *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the "separate but equal" ruling of the Supreme Court, Thurgood Marshall and the *Brown v. The Board of Education*, brave young men and women standing before university doors surrounded by the National Guard and angry whites, including workers granted just a few years earlier the right to aspire to the middle class lifestyle. At least in this lecture, Haiven does not recall these years when opened doors slammed closed on Black Americans who had to force them open once again.

Of course, this time around, Thurgood Marshalls are hard to find and brave young Black men and women willing to risk their lives not just for an excluded community but most importantly, to stand on the right side of history. They have been distracted in the last 40 years by the corporate model of ideal citizens engaged in consumerism not

activism, alienated from self and any notion of a collective history of struggle.

Haiven recognizes that the university is in the service of capitalism and the market. The values of society, he adds, are now values of cost benefits. We should invest, most of all, in the university for the "social good" Haiven argues.

Instead, the university is the place where student / citizen racks up debt and this status of indebtedness allows for the shaping and disciplining of new workers. The university's production is not an educated or skilled student / citizen but workers compliant within the framework of capitalism. In turn, "the worker" is afraid to protest. Haiven points out they are "afraid to rise up and struggle" since, once the in-debt-student graduates, he or she must comply and find whatever work is available to repay their loans. The student-in-debt / future worker is brought into "compliance with a system that isn't in their interests." "Debt forces to abide by the norms of the system."

As Haiven rightly notes, a "police force" is not needed to control this population.

In addition, debt, Haiven states, produces student / citizens with few or no expectations of attaining the middle-class lifestyle. *You should know, the university says to this population, that the middle-class lifestyle is not guaranteed!* Uncertainties create uncertain subjects, citizens with no demands over their education or the conditions of their workplace.

The "subject" cannot *think* on their relations with other human beings or the collective is stuck thinking, as individuals, only of survival from day-to-day, Haiven argues.

These subjects buy the rhetoric dished out by corporate advertisers and the corporate media. *Know that the CEOs bonuses rise annually to astronomical heights and their homes sit on islands. Watch as we bring you the latest news via television or Twitter on your favorite idol and the rich and the famous sporting the designer clothes and flashing the big diamond ring.*

What happens to that pent-up anger? *No more guarantees of a middle-class lifestyle for you!*

Well, we know. Someone or some "special interests" group is to blame. Blacks and immigrants, women who should have remained at home! The usual parade of culprits near at hand! Easy targets! Visible most notably when a collective of individuals fear their right to the American Dream is in danger of being taken away. Haiven need not remind many of us of this phenomenon in the U.S.

I would argue that capitalism's movement counts on this distraction and confusion among citizens. Chaos is as profitable as "peace." *We are here with this capitalist movement serving as the driving force against other alternative ways of being because we were never there in a democratic society at the origins of the state or its institutions.*

*We are in dire-straits!*

As an adjunct professor, Haiven has observed that however much these students in debt are distracted by the rhetoric of capitalism, the last thing they want is distraction from their life's pursuit, from getting through classes in order to obtain that job!

*We are at the stage when the captain calls out: "Red Alert!"* The new citizen, the new worker, fights - but fights to become a more willing slave to what those workers who got aboard trains labeled the middle-class! I think Malcolm would say the chickens have come home to roast! You get what you desired if what you desired was that paradise of the innocent. But now even these words are no longer good enough!

The angry students promised nothing at all but, forced to enter the doors of the university like so many sheep, are willing to be accomplices of their torturers. *Why not resist the distraction of words and images of some other era when you have been taught to see only the here and now, some other way of being in the world without "happiness" and the potential source of your happiness?*

Haiven has observed those classes of students, the new future worker tired, he says, of giving "special interests" groups their mental energy in the classroom, and they hate the distraction of discussions on race, gender, and class!

*Red Alert! The new citizen / worker has arrived!* As I have noted in my experience, these new citizen / workers as students become the police! *Armies of storm troopers in university / factory varsity jackets and in university / factory sweatshirts!*

Max Haiven suggests that we imagine something beyond the public and private university, something, he offers, akin to education on a grassroots level, where citizens ask the question: "what should our society be?"

Abandoning the public and private educational institutions from K through higher education is the only viable option for the survival of all aboard this ship labeled the U.S. Empire, but however dire our situation, we are not aboard the USS Enterprise with a rational captain and ranking officers - or even crew! And for this reason, I argue for the recognition from those on the Left that we are in worse shape than citizens who historically defended their right to exist in other eras - worse, in ways than those in Greece now or Spain who amass by the thousands in regular, daily protests.

Marx could write of the French worker:

They have no ideals to realize, but to set free the elements of the new society with which the old collapsing bourgeois society itself is pregnant. In the full consciousness of their historic mission, and with the heroic resolve to act up to it, the working class can afford to smile at the coarse invective of the gentlemen's gentlemen with the pen and inkhorn, and at the didactic patronage of well-wishing bourgeois-doctrinaires, pouring forth their ignorant platitudes and sectarian crochets in the oracular tone of scientific infallibility. (from *The Civil War in France*)

How do you abandon the sinking ship when all hands collaborate, knowingly or unknowingly to bring it down? How do you tell the student to stop attending the university or stopping paying the debt - forego your personal goals for the social good? How do these in-debt-students, future workers, resist the movement "forward" with capitalism when they have no history of past movements of resistance?

Grassroots level education is fine, but it is certainly not new. In recent memory, the Black Panthers tried it, and for a time, the organization was successful. That is the problem, right? This kind of success has a history of encountering the State's iron boot! It is even dangerous for individuals to attempt this kind of "militancy" now as the legal apparatus of the State will find a way to cite some kind of "violation."

Surely the Occupy Movement, for example, is engaging in grassroots education, but not on a mass scale.

Start small, okay. But consider Haiven's question: "What should our society be?" - a call to proactively consider the forms resistance should take for this era in light of the fact that the majority of our new workers at the edu-factories across this country are no less prison camp laborers, and the "elite" among them are the chosen few who will serve as the Empire's agri-specialists, drone manufacturers and operators, skilled language manipulators for the media and "special interests" groups such as Exxon Mobil and GS, managers of corporate finance, legal and policy makers for the "judicial system" and Homeland security, and teachers - at all levels.

*Compliance is a bitch! And it kills!*

It is hard to turn people around on a dime. We need a change in circumstances and people if we are to avoid the death of not just millions, but this planet.

In *At the Mind's Limits*, Amery, a resistance fighter and survivor of torture at Auschwitz, writes of the multiple-front lines and methods of attack at the Nazis' disposal. There he was, a Jew and resistor, hanging by his arms in a cell for distributing leaflets while the Nazi war machine destroyed towns and cities and transported the enemy to be worked to death or exterminated outright.

Amery remembers:

The piles of corpses that lie between them and me cannot be removed in the process of internalization, so it seems to me, but, on the contrary, through actualization, or, more strongly stated, by actively settling the unresolved conflict in the field of historical practice.

Our new workers trained at the edu-factory cannot identify with the current piles of corpses between themselves and the current Superpower regime.

As the late German writer, W.G. Sebald, wrote of Amery's philosophy, he held on to the "validity of resistance even to the point of absurdity." Resistance must follow "out of a principle of solidarity with

victims and as a deliberate affront to those who simply let the stream of history sweep them along" (*On the Natural History of Destruction*)

*We live in this moment. How will we respond when even Nature resists our ignorance? How do we resist meaningfully and beyond rhetoric and a compliant workforce stuck on capitalism?*

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Max Haiven, "Student Debt and the Edu-Factory: Against the Foreclosure of the Future" (originally recorded at Dalhousie University, January 2012. Haiven is a Postdoctoral Fellow Department of Art and Public Policy New York University and Adjunct Faculty Division of Historical and Critical Studies Nova Scotia College of Art and Design University and a member of the Edu-Factory Collective (activists).



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