



Neary, M. (2020). *Student as producer*. Zero Books.

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The core of *Student as producer* lies in its revolutionary curriculum, a manifesto wrapped around an exacting critique of the law of labour, that is the organising principle of capitalist work. The author Mike Neary aims his accusation primarily at the law of labour for ignoring the intellectual and educational needs of students in favour of pandering to the needs of the capitalist state and economic prosperity of the elite. Neary extends this criticism to the institutions where he observes the law of labour to be enforced, institutions he terms as capitalist universities. His account situates itself in a significant period in higher education in the United Kingdom, sandwiched between the student protests and urban riots that erupted in England in 2010-2011 and the 2017 General Election. These protests and riots were held in support for a government-supported higher education and other progressive social policies, as part of a new socialist political project. The design of the revolutionary curriculum in this book involves unlearning the law of labour and redefining the institutions through which this law is enforced. The institutions the author refers to include universities that he identifies as one of the primary sources for the sustenance of the capitalist system.

Mike Neary was formerly the Director of Research in the School for Social and Political Sciences at the University of Lincoln. He headed the *Student as producer* initiative at the university and suggested that students should move from being the object of the educational process supporting the capitalist economy to being its main subject (Jack, 2016). His critical reinterpretation of Marx's social theory forms the basis of most of his research work and writings. In his proposal of revolutionary teaching, he argues that students should not only be consumers of knowledge but instead, become its producers. This, he explains, can be achieved by engaging in meaningful, generative work alongside the university's faculty. His main aim is to establish a post-capitalist university, grounded historically in the radical practices and culture of the co-operative labour movement. Referencing the work of Russian legal theorist, Evgeny Pashukanis (who was denounced and executed as a Trotskyite saboteur in 1937), *Student as producer* seeks answers by examining how cooperatives can come together, united by a mutual sense of common purpose and social wellbeing. He suggests that this theory ought to be applied to "various aspects of pedagogy, criminology, and political sociology to

create curricula for revolutionary teaching that will support activists looking for opportunities to engage critically with higher education" (Neary, 2021, p. 3) and remove them from the shackles of capitalist ideologies. He argues that the answer to the question of how revolutionary teachers impart knowledge lies not only in the idea of implementing critical pedagogy but in fact, can be found in the reconstructing of a knowledge economy at the level of society. This is necessary as Neary suggests that capitalist production had transformed the world into a "global labour camp" (p. 3). This is a disturbing phenomenon that Neary argues has to be addressed and unlearned.

This book can be considered as a manifestation of Neary's critical reinterpretation of Marx's social theory. The first chapter begins by orientating the reader about the curricula or the course of action needed to initiate a revolution in the university, followed by the second chapter which presents the author's personal perspective in the wake of the protests in the United Kingdom. The second chapter underlines the main aim of the book as a resistance necessary to counter the assault on higher education and the political economy. This chapter also delivers a harsh critique against the police whom Neary accuses of supporting the capitalist regime instead of upholding democracy and justice. The third chapter builds upon this critique and defines the author's reinterpretation of Marxism in Walter Benjamin's "The author as producer" (1934).

In the next chapter, Neary presents the reformist ideas of revolutionary teachers such as Freire, Ranci re and Allman. Neary ends this chapter highlighting that Freire's ideas about education resonate most with the ideas presented in *Student as producer*. In the fifth chapter, the author consolidates all his arguments from the earlier chapters highlighting that the co-operative university is not the end goal but merely a step in establishing the democratic principle towards the ambition of realising "a communist future", free from the fetters of the capitalist economy (p. 40). Finally, in the last chapter, aptly titled "Afterword: authority and authorship", Neary proposes his version of the police which he terms as the 'not-police'(p. 250). He describes this version as a new form of social institution needed to defend a society attempting to deny authoritarianism and responsible for executing the pedagogic function to sustain common

purpose and social defence.

Student as producer proves itself to be an acerbic and captivating critique of capitalist education systems. The individual arguments in each chapter have been seamlessly weaved into a coherent narrative to restate the meaning and purpose of higher education by reconnecting the core activities of universities. Some parts in this book remind us of Professor Raewyn Connell's work *The good university*, where she similarly argued for reforms in higher education and highlighted the importance of involving all stakeholders to create an inclusive research and learning environment working towards authentic knowledge production (Connell, 2019; Irving & Connell, 2016). *Student as producer*, to a large extent, emphasises the role of the students as collaborators central to the production of knowledge. However, the author responsibly acknowledges that this idea is not new and in fact, constructed upon the ideas of thinkers such as Freire and Allman.

Despite proposing a radical reform movement in proposing a co-operative university based on democratic foundations as described in chapter five, the book fails to take into consideration the different contexts and cultures global universities are situated in. While the idea of liberating the critical collective intelligence of society as a form of "intellectual emancipation" (Neary, 2020, p. 43) may be courageous, the political inclinations in one country are likely very much different from that of another (Altiparmakis, et al., 2021). In a predominantly capitalist world adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic (Carnevale et al., 2020; Kolodko, 2020), the idea of universities as a revolutionary instrument in the UK and elsewhere sounds far-fetched. In my opinion, universities, in capitalist systems or otherwise, continue to provide excellent contributions and ought to be lauded for their resilience in adapting to the changing norms in the wake of the pandemic. Such revolutionary ideas however, ought to be considered through a lens of scepticism and the attention instead, shifted towards the introduction of progressive reforms to facilitate and support universities adapting to the new normal of the COVID-19 pandemic world.

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