Comment and Response

Poverty and Misery: An Analysis and Some Implications for Social Intellectuals*

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I see Hodgkinson as just another minor author rushing to join the queue of thinkers lambasting public spending, bureaucratic inefficiency, and supporting the rich against the poor. His American colleagues include Howard Jarvis of Proposition 13 fame (Blaustein, 1978), Arthur Laffer and his curve, and the resurrected Milton Friedman – the economic monetarist who prefers "freedom" to employment without specifying it as "freedom" for the rich (and Friedman) to get richer and for the increasing number of the poor to stay in that condition. British Columbia is well stocked with these friendly reactionaries (Adler, 1980), as is Alberta where Joe Clark lost the 1980 federal election on a platform of handouts to the rich and increased taxation of the relatively poor with neither investments nor available capital. And then there is Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom who still cannot believe that her Friedmanite monetarism in a world of administered prices has resulted in high unemployment, high inflation, high interest rates and, lest we forget, a "de-industrialization" of the country.

I should like to point out how Hodgkinson's "ideology" (Buss, 1979, p. 18) has forced him to take his intellectual signals from people of this stripe.

First, he dislikes the pursuit of wealth (cash or material advantages, labelled W_o) – "A defensible proposition is that man's chief end is the pursuit of wealth" – without considering whether (and for whom) such a pursuit is justifiable. Lundberg (1969) offers a standard definition of the poor who are justifiably attempting (and failing) to acquire more W_o. "I would say that anyone who does not have a fairly substantial amount of income-producing property or does not receive an annual income

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sufficiently large to make substantial regular savings or does not hold a well-paid securely tenured job is poor ... By this standard at least 70 percent of Americans are certainly poor ..." (Lundberg, 1969, p. 23). Figures for Canada (Adams et al., 1971, p. 16) are not quite so high but must have increased in the last decade because of spreading automation and the degradation of skilled jobs by high technology (Swift & Kuyek, 1980). These are not the conditions for a Friedmanite-Hodgkinson paradise in which people are content to work for a small amount of W_0 to enjoy the pleasure of private contemplation (this is W_i as we shall see), but for strikes, social malaise, an increase in anti-social behaviour and possibly, lest we forget again, at least an attempted revolution. Hodgkinson's W_i is really an escape from this state of affairs (Jacoby, 1975, p. 105).

Second, Hodgkinson finds P (labelled P_0) distasteful, although his definition of the term is ambiguous. In one place, it seems to mean bureaucratic power in the public domain. Thus we find: "W_0 gives its possessor command over goods and services in the public domain (P_0)." But what about a like command in the so-called "private" domain by the technostructure of monopoly capitalism? This must surely be familiar to Canadians whose economy is controlled by multinational corporations, usually with an address in the United States, which siphon off profits from their Canadian branch plants (a major source of the Canadian imbalance of payments and for the low value of the paper currency) and allow little research and development to go on (another source of financial problems). This point has been made in greater detail by Travis (1979).

Later, Hodgkinson defines P_0 quite differently. "P_0 represents the individual's power to control the objective world through wealth ... ." However, this merely takes us back to the "robber barons" instead of the industrial society which is responsible for this "domination of nature," a theme that challenged researchers in the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research throughout its career. Dealing with its post-war emphasis, Jay (1973) writes: "The capitalist mode of exploitation was now seen in a larger context as the specific, historical form of domination of the bourgeois era of Western history" (p. 256). Since the U.S.S.R. also practises such "domination," the term "industrialized" must replace "bourgeois" society. The question, then, is whether Hodgkinson is trying to use teachers to change an economic system by their work in schools. This dream of Dewey has been dealt with at greater length by Anderson and Travis (1980).

The final term in Hodgkinson's algebraic expression is Happiness (H), not a pleasant state if it is a combination of W_0 and P_0. But, equally, if most people do not have W_0 and P_0, they cannot be happy either. For example, our "Victorian predecessors," as manufacturers, lusting for wealth and power, were unhappy. The results were also disastrous for their workers who were trying to keep body and soul alive (Carey, 1980, p. 42). The first Fabian document was entitled, with good reason, "Why are the many poor?" (Cole, 1964, p. 6)

Indeed, Hodgkinson has to perform some verbal hat tricks in dealing with H partly because he assumes that, unlike W and P, it has no substantive polar opposite (it exists as H or does not exists, as $-H$), and partly because he wants to define it negatively. It does not mean, he says, "sensory pleasure," in which category he includes very ascetically "sexual activity"; perhaps a female author might have concluded that this is a measure of affection (Hacker, 1977, p. 24). But Hodgkinson must define the H to which a combination of his goods (W_i and P_i) will lead. After balking at describing this important dependent variable, he emerges with the Maslovian higher-order needs: "status," "self-esteem" and "self-actualisation." This is not a compelling performance because Maslow, an anxiety-laden, depressed man, derived these superordinate needs from a study of W_o people at whose service he placed his conceptions faithfully (Wilson, 1973).

Of Hodgkinson's "goods" (W_i and P_i), only W_i need concern us; P_i is listed as some "internal control" resulting in H and we may leave the symbol to rest in peace. It is on W_i, his central concept, that Hodgkinson lavishes all his attention. Sometimes he labels it without offering definitions: W_i is "inner goods," "inner wealth," "an enriched endowment of experience" and "personal enrichment." Much worse is a series of disparate descriptions, again without definitions. W_i becomes a "memory bank" plus "characterological attributes," learning not leading to W_o, "attitudes, values, qualities of self-awareness," "creativity and will" and "self-development." "The simplest public expression of W_i is the assessment contained in the general terms personality, individuality and character."

I am afraid this is a farrago of nonsense, applicable equally to Bismarck, Einstein, or your local psychopath, depending on the meaning assigned to the terms. As I have pointed out elsewhere (Anderson, 1979), the good man can be defined only negatively as the person who has fought against notorious evil. Positive definitions take the form of a list of abstract values which become ambiguous when applied to concrete matters (Anderson, 1979, p. 37).

Like the somewhat dated run of social intellectuals, Hodgkinson believes that, somehow, teachers should emphasise the "W_i orientation" which, so he reports, characterizes "complex organizations" like General Motors after some level of W_o has been reached. When a satisfactory amount of profit has been achieved, they "*render a service*" (emphasis in the original). The nature of the "service" is not specified, although it cannot be the after-sales variety which is never good. Perhaps Hodgkinson might have done better to refer to Galbraith's (1967) non-commercial motivation of the technostructure, an idea still besieged (Miliband, 1968) but with an academic, not an administrative, backing.

Hodgkinson's coda to his paper asserts that the W_i orientation has to be lodged "into the meaning and reality of what goes on in schooling systems." I know that he wants to end on a high note, but this vocation

ascribed to teachers is a product of his dream machine. The teachers, at least those in junior and senior high schools, are scrambling to stay alive and sane, as they make their way through the ordinary curriculum. Pupils drink liquor, smoke pot, engage in sexual activity, do menial work after school hours and work at the curriculum to get into medicine, law, business administration, and engineering at various levels. A tiny handful will want to become poets, musicians, and writers, and read philosophy, but no one would ever want to build a curriculum for them, not even at the university level, after Tussman's (1969) somewhat ignominious failure. An industrial society is organised around W_o, and public schools from their inception were designed as a means to achieving W_o with little W_i to please the local gentry. Not even Matthew Arnold, let alone contemporary teachers, could do much to alter this state of affairs.

What Hodgkinson is saying in his hurried and apologetic prose is that education should consist largely of reading Plato and Kant, useful when one joins the queue to pick up an unemployment cheque. This may be a vision dear to the Thatcherites and Friedmanites who have thrown in their lot with the robotised and automated "free enterprises" of the future. A more likely scenario, however, is one in which these people will take to the streets rather than bother with political palaver; then Hodgkinson and I will have our peaceful contemplations rudely awakened. I am all in favour of a closet idealist like Hodgkinson being taken to the hangman, but I do object to being dragged along with him.

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