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## **ACCUSATIONS OF MARXIST BIAS IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION DURING THE 1970s: ACADEMIC FREEDOM UNDER THREAT?<sup>1</sup>**

My focus in this paper is quite specific, and historical: it concerns public criticism, in the second half of the 1970s, of an Open University course concerned with the sociology of education – E202 *Schooling and Society*. However, I will try to locate this course, and criticism of it, in a broader context and examine their implications. The main criticism of E202 was contained in a review of one its Readers (Dale et al 1976) in the *Times Educational Supplement*, under the title ‘Scholarship, or propaganda?’ (Gould 1977a). The review was written by Julius Gould, then a professor of sociology at the University of Nottingham, who was in the process of writing a report, for The Institute for the Study of Conflict, concerned with ‘the penetration of extremist minorities and ideas in education and its effect on the liberal values of a pluralist society’ (Gould 1977b).<sup>2</sup> Gould’s review of *Schooling and Capitalism*, and his subsequent report, provoked much public discussion, with the arguments of both sides being reported in the media. It subsequently led to an internal inquiry within The Open University, and to the establishment of a new University policy on external assessment of courses. A parallel inquiry took place within the BBC as regards the radio and television programmes made for the Course.<sup>3</sup>

It seems to me that this case has considerable interest for understanding a key phase in the development of the sociology of education in the UK, and of social science more generally in the second half of the twentieth century; but I will also suggest that the issues raised retain significance today, indeed that to a large extent they remain unresolved.

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Donald Mackinnon and Peter Woods for comments on an earlier draft of this paper, and to the Open University Archive for providing access to some of the relevant documents. A revised version of the early part of this paper has been published in the journal *Contemporary British History* 30, 2, pp242-59.

<sup>2</sup> Other similar reports had been produced by other organizations around the same time, for example Swerling 1972.

<sup>3</sup> There had been similar criticisms of other OU courses, and of sociology courses more generally, but this case generated the most publicity. I have a particular interest in it (in both senses of the term), since I was a member of the E202 Course Team. The main earlier criticism of OU materials for political bias had been by Caroline Cox (now The Baroness Cox of Queensbury), aimed at the course D302 *Patterns of Inequality*, and by Hugh Freeman, a psychiatrist, objecting to the Marxist account of psychiatry included in material from two other courses: see Cox 1976 and Freeman 1976. These earlier critics were mentioned by Gould. Cox, an OU tutor at the time of her criticism, had taught at the Polytechnic of North London, where there had been a sustained challenge against the Director from student radicals, supported by some members of staff: see Jacka et al 1975 and Campbell nd. The events at PNL and at other universities represent a crucial backdrop to the accusations of Marxist bias discussed in this paper. In the book co-authored with Jacka and Marks, Cox also criticised E282, the predecessor to E202, for its alleged promotion of relativism, rejection of all authority and of academic standards. The Institute for the Study of Conflict, under whose auspices the Gould report was produced, was set up by Brian Crozier, an activist in ‘the secret war for people’s minds’ (Crozier 1993:xiii). The ‘study group’ which produced the report involved not just Gould and Crozier but also Cox and several academics generally regarded as having political views broadly Right of Centre, including Antony Flew, Kenneth Minogue, and Edward Shils. The ISC was funded by the CIA, just as had been the Congress for Cultural Freedom and the magazine *Encounter* in the 1950s: see Coleman 1989.

## Setting the stage: the ‘end of ideology’

As background, it is useful to begin in the 1950s, when there were influential claims that Western societies had reached a stage of development marked by ‘the end of ideology’. In various forms, Raymond Aron, Daniel Bell, Seymour Martin Lipset, Edward Shils, and others, argued that the influence of ideologies – which they saw as involving a form of thinking characteristic of totalitarian regimes – was waning in Europe and the United States: the nationalist ideologies that had prevailed in Germany and Italy in the early twentieth century had been extinguished by the Second World War, and they believed that communism in the Soviet Union and elsewhere would also eventually wither away or change in character (see Shils 1955; Aron 1957:Conclusion; Bell 2000). Of particular significance for the development of the idea of ‘the end of ideology’ is the influence that Marxism had had amongst some US intellectuals in the 1930s and 40s. However, New Deal politics, revelations about the treatment of dissent in the USSR, and the Hitler-Stalin pact, subsequently led to a decline in commitment to Marxism by the 1950s. Indeed, some proponents of the idea of ‘the end of ideology’ had themselves moved from Marxism to the Centre Left or even the Centre Right (see Liebowitz 1985:20-1; Cooney 1986).<sup>4</sup>

They argued that in Western societies there was now widespread agreement across much of the political spectrum on the need for a mixed economy in which the operation of the market was allowed to flourish but at the same time was constrained by public intervention to minimize adverse effects; with, in some countries, this including public control of particular sectors of the economy, such as health provision, transport, energy, and other utilities (see Tribe 2009:88-9). Furthermore, the working class in Western societies had increasingly been incorporated into the polity through the extension of suffrage, institutionalisation of the role of trades unions, and the rise of state provision for welfare. Shils (1953:455-6), writing at the time, expresses the perspective of many claiming ‘the end of ideology’:

the asperities of the debate between socialism and capitalism seem to be fading. The achievements of the American and Western European economies since the war, together with the political equivocality of centrally planned economies, the failures of economic planning in the Soviet satellite states, the

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<sup>4</sup> On the complex case of Daniel Bell, whose position in the 1950s was a product of his analysis of the failure of the American socialist movement of which he had been part, see Liebowitz 1985 and Brick 1986. Some commentators have suggested that the idea of the end of ideology can be traced back to Mannheim’s (1936) *Ideology and Utopia* (see Dittberner 1979), from which was inherited an ambivalence between interpreting ideologies as incommensurable worldviews each true in its own terms, on the one hand, and treating them as false products of defective thinking, on the other. However, Liebowitz (1985) questions this continuity, emphasizing the importance of the influence of Schlesinger, Niebuhr, and Weber. Meanwhile, Lipset (1985) has claimed that the sources of the idea were much more diverse, and that they spread across the political spectrum, being shared by those who deplored the end of ideology – often characterizing it as ‘apathy’ – as well as those who celebrated it. It is worth noting that Aron (1962:xv-xvi), whose circumstances were of course very different from the Americans’, is also often seen as moving from Left to Right over the course of his intellectual career, but he insisted on the need to fight apathy as much as ideology. On Aron see Colquhoun 1986 and Anderson 1997. Of course, others have suggested that apathy on the part of most citizens most of the time is an essential precondition for stable democratic government, see for example Schumpeter 1942.

re-introduction of the principles of the market economy into their economies by some of the Communist states, and the modest and by no means glamorous achievements of nationalized industries in England and France, have cooled the fires of a century-long dispute between the proponents of socialism and the advocates of capitalism.

What political disagreements remained, it was argued, operated within a much narrower band than previously.<sup>5</sup>

The word ‘ideology’ was used by those, like Shils, announcing the new consensus to refer to a comprehensive worldview that claimed to offer answers to all relevant political and social questions, one which demanded total and unbending commitment, and which was protected by arguments designed to discredit alternatives. In effect, ideologies were seen as secular equivalents of fundamentalist religions, and resistance to them paralleled earlier liberal resistance to theocracy (though this did not, of course, imply rejection of all religion).<sup>6</sup>

There are two aspects to the kind of liberalism underpinning the end of ideology thesis. The first is opposition to any comprehensive framework of thought or belief (about the nature of the world, what is good and bad, etc) that is intended to control behaviour across a whole society. Secondly, there is an insistence that, in making any decision, people should be open-minded rather than dogmatic, and that they ought to rely only on beliefs that have been vindicated by evidence, on plans of action that are realistic and whose costs have been assessed, and so on. Moreover, they should be tolerant of views that are discrepant with their own, so long as these have been adopted open-mindedly, on the basis of evidence, and do not threaten the free expression of other views.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Interestingly at the conference in Milan in 1955 which brought this perspective to wider attention, this view was denounced by Hayek, who believed that ‘state intervention is bad and inherently totalitarian, [and] found himself in a small minority of those who still took the cleavages within the democratic camp seriously’ (Lipset 1960:405).

<sup>6</sup> On ideologies as religions, see, for example, Aron 1957:ch9; Anderson 1997:64-71. See also Niebuhr 1943:86. The idea of political religions goes back at least to Voegelin 1938. A more radical version is the idea that Enlightenment and Romantic ideas are secular forms of earlier Christian notions (Löwith 1949). Searle (1972) argued that student radicalism needed to be understood as a (secular) religious movement. However, the meaning given to ‘ideology’ and the particular arguments advanced were quite diverse: see Dittberner 1979. There is also the question of the relationship between ideologies and utopian thinking: arguably it was the latter that was one of the main targets of proponents of the ‘end of ideology’.

<sup>7</sup> Of course, there are different forms of liberalism, or at least very different interpretations of it. The central meaning I am giving the term here is a commitment to parliamentary government that restricts itself to setting the boundaries of individual and communal freedom and legislating only on matters relating to these boundaries or where there is substantial consensus. At the individual level it involves tolerance of views and activities of which one disapproves unless they seriously threaten one’s own or others’ activities, or the liberal character of the state. Crucial here is a resistance to treating those with different views or life styles as enemies unless they pose a serious threat. Note that at any point in time this involves accepting some current settlement – for example as regards the extent of state intervention in the economy – and accepting changes to this as legitimate if occurring through democratic channels, so long as they do not undermine the liberal character of the society. From this point of view, any change must be piecemeal: rather than the aim being to realize some socio-political ideal, the task is to deal with specific problems as they arise, recognizing that there may well be limits to what can be done. What is essential is that a society be ‘open’ rather than ‘closed’, and therefore capable of addressing and resolving problems in the most effective way (Popper 1945 and 1957). As this makes

In the UK, the 1950s were a period of considerable political consensus across the main political parties, despite sharp disagreements over particular issues, notably Suez (see Marquand 1988:2-3, ch1; Sandbrook 2005).<sup>8</sup> McClymont (2014) provides a useful summary:

For social democrats, the post-war years are usually seen as halcyon days. Across the Western world, including the United Kingdom, societies became healthier, wealthier and more equal. Inequalities were compressed as the dynamism of industrial capitalism was harnessed by the state – both national and local – and by strong trade unions, in the interests of the many not the few. Political parties, while never enjoying a golden age of public approbation, enjoyed mass memberships. Voter turnout was high. Trust in ‘official’ institutions and in the good intentions of public servants was maintained, although here too there was never a golden age. Political and social democracy co-existed for the first time. The Attlee Government’s promise of a revolution in social security and health-care won it first the votes and then the loyalty of a substantial urbanised and unionised working class employed in an economy characterised by the regionally concentrated heavy industries that had suffered such brutal punishment during the inter-war period. [...] The swing back towards the Conservative Party that gathered pace across the 1950s was originally a middle class revolt against the ‘austerity’ imposed by the compression of inequalities across UK society. It did not seriously threaten social democracy; rather, the Conservatives added the distinctive and popular attractions of the consumer society to the social democratic foundations Labour had established. Governments – Labour and Conservative – proceeded on a consensual basis until the worldwide institutional breakdown of Keynesian social democracy during the 1970s [...].

The consensus involved here was, to a large extent, a legacy from the collective effort involved in fighting the Second World War. However, even at that time, the idea of ‘the end of ideology’ was by no means universally accepted. And by the late 1950s and early 1960s there were movements flourishing on both Left and Right that challenged the prevailing consensus, notably the ‘New Left’ (see Thompson 1960; Teodori 1969), organized around what became the journal *New Left Review*, and, on the Right, focused on organizations such as the *Institute of Economic Affairs*, influenced by Hayek and committed to ‘free markets’ rather than to the mixed economy characteristic of 1950s Britain.<sup>9</sup> By the late 1960s the established political

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clear, there are not only many shades of liberalism but there is also considerable scope for disagreement at particular times and on particular issues. It would be a mistake to view the proponents of the end of ideology as all having identical views, despite their shared commitment to this broad kind of liberalism. There is a massive literature on liberalism, outlining its history and advocating various versions (or revisions) of it (see, for example, Gray 1995b), as well as challenges to liberalism from different directions (see Wolff et al 1969, Cowling 1990, Kekes 1997).

<sup>8</sup> Some commentators question the existence of this consensus, see for example Pimlott 1988 and Pimlott et al 1989. However, what seems to be at issue here is partly the question of what the word ‘consensus’ means – for Pimlott it is more than just agreement – and over what period it is held to have existed – he criticizes claims that it lasted until the 1970s. For a more recent discussion, favouring the concept of ‘settlement’ instead of consensus, see Barnes 2002.

<sup>9</sup> Stuart Hall dated the change in intellectual climate as taking place after 1954, referring to the situation among Oxford students (Hall 1989:16-17). In wider terms, 1956 seems to have been a crucial

consensus was coming under increasing strain, including from student agitation in universities (see Martin 1981; Moore-Gilbert and Seed 1992; Thomas 2002; Marwick 2006). Speaking in 1970, Julius Gould (1970:15) spoke of his ‘fears, which events have verified, that the social stability of the nineteen fifties, whatever its extent and whatever its sources, would, like similar periods in the past, prove temporary, precarious and fragile’.

Many of those among the new generation coming to adulthood towards the end of the 1960s had significantly different attitudes from the older generations. They had been the beneficiaries of the relative affluence of the later 1950s. But many of them also reacted against what they saw as the conventional morality and consumerism characteristic of that period. It was this that served as the background to their perspective on the world, whereas for many of those belonging to the preceding generations it had been the threat of National Socialism and the Second World War, and especially the Cold War that followed it, which were crucial.<sup>10</sup> In a volume devoted to Raymond Aron, Missika and Holton (1983:12-13) sought to explain the contrast in attitude between their own generation and his as follows:

[...] the standard of living had broadly improved, [...] some social inequalities have been reduced, and [...] the school system has become partially democratized. But because our generation has directly experienced these transformations without having known the earlier circumstances, we have found them, in a certain way, natural, and instead of being satisfied with the growth and enrichment of life that has taken place, we have tended, rather, to focus our energies on the fight to eliminate the stubborn social and cultural inequalities that remain.

So, the political concerns of those on the Left among the new generation mainly related to the failure of society to live up to its ideals, not just as evidence by continuing inequalities but also the West’s possession of nuclear weapons, and its neo-imperialism, as exemplified by the Vietnam War. They argued that the contrast drawn between totalitarianism and liberal society in terms of freedom and toleration was bogus: limits were placed on radical dissent in the West just as much as in the Soviet Union, albeit in more subtle ways – to a large extent dissent was tolerated but ignored. In this way the criticisms that liberals had directed at totalitarianism were thrown back at them: it was often argued that, despite appearances, Western societies were police states, and that the freedom and tolerance they displayed was in fact repressive. It amounted to little more than the freedom to be unemployed, or (if employed) to buy consumer goods. It was a tolerance that allowed harmless expressions of dissent but that resisted any serious effort to change society for the better: what was involved was ‘repressive tolerance’ (Marcuse 1969). All of these concerns were central to the radical student movement that developed in the United

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year, witnessing both the Suez Crisis and the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian uprising. On the Institute of Economic Affairs, see Tribe 2009:88-9. Even allowing for hyperbole, Cowling’s (1990:xxi) characterisation of the attitude behind the IEA in the 1960s is illuminating: ‘it wanted to blow up the consensus’.

<sup>10</sup> In effect, what we have here is a conflict between what Mannheim (1952) refers to as generation units (a concept that was introduced to students of E202 by Peter Woods in Units 27/8). The perspective of the new generation picked up on the cultural anti-bourgeois sensibility that had emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. On this sensibility see Pippin 2005:3-4.

States and in Europe in the 1960s, evidenced especially in the widespread demonstrations and conflicts of 1968.

So, an influential section of the new generation believed that liberal, welfare capitalism fell far short of what is both desirable and viable in political terms. They demanded greater equality in material reward – income, housing, etc; the reduction or elimination of alienating forms of work; the establishment of cooperative rather than competitive forms of life; and the realization of genuine democracy in which all can participate. Furthermore, they believed that achieving such change is possible, and that those who denied this were simply protecting their own interests, which fundamental social change would threaten.<sup>11</sup>

There was a sharp reaction against these radical views, and the forms of political action they generated, even on the part of some in the older generations whose political position could be broadly described as on the Left.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, in the early 1970s the oil crisis had a significant destabilizing effect on the UK economy, raising fears about the future (see Marquand 1988; Beckett 2009:ch6 and *passim*; Sandbrook 2011 and 2012). Gould (1977b:4) captures neatly one response to this situation:

Britain in the late nineteen-seventies is quite clearly a nation in conflict. Beset by severe economic problems, laden with the legacy of inadequate solutions to those economic problems, its political and cultural orders are both equally under strain. And that strain is growing. Such strains and conflicts are in good measure endemic to a plural society – one that enshrines the maximum tolerance of divergent views both about social and political goals and about the means to their attainment. In our pride in such a polity – embodying as it does “the right to oppose” – it is easy to forget how rare, fragile and precarious an achievement it all is. It is easy, too, to forget that its future depends upon two fundamentals that are closely linked with each other.

*The first is its effectiveness in solving material and economic problems. The second is its continued acceptance as “legitimate” – that is upon willingness, among all social classes and all generations, to uphold its basic values and principles.*<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> This is a broad sketch of views, and there were, of course, significant differences in perspective about these issues. Jacka et al (1975:145) argued that this new perspective was the product of a ‘cultural revolution’ in the 1960s. They write ‘week after week the skilful satirists of Private Eye and BBC Television [presumably the reference is to such programmes as *That Was the Week That Was*] destroyed the faith of the young in those who occupied any official position or held to any enduring values’. They also accuse pop musicians, playwrights, and film-makers of being complicit in this. This echoed the views of the Clean-up TV campaigner Mary Whitehouse in the 1960s, who apparently believed that the attack on the moral standards of British society that she was fighting was funded by Moscow (Turner 2013:133, 136). During the late 1950s and 60s there was certainly growing public irreverence towards politicians and others in powerful positions in the UK. Jacka et al, and other commentators, saw this ‘apparently spontaneous’ culture-shift as making for ‘a defenceless society’ and paving the way for ‘the conspiratorial political revolution which is now being attempted’.

<sup>12</sup> Particularly strong criticism came from the Centre Left, see for example the books on the student revolt by Aron (1969) and Searle (1972).

<sup>13</sup> Italics in original. See also Jacka et al 1975:145-6. This echoes the views of Raymond Aron, as described by Missika and Wolton (1983:11-12): ‘[Aron] knows that our society is mortal, something

Gould's position here seems to represent what has been called the 'liberalism of fear' (Shklar 1989). This involves, above all, an emphasis on realism: on what is possible, and on the dangers intrinsic to social life. But I suspect it also represented the views of those who felt that from the late 1950s and into the 60s there had been a gradual move away from the settlement of the 1950s towards socialism and permissiveness (see Gould 1980:400 and 1989:511-12). They saw an urgent need to reverse these trends.<sup>14</sup>

By contrast, for some among the younger generations, the changed situation of the 1970s underlined the failings, and the fundamentally repressive character, of British society. Moreover, they too felt that a point had been reached where outright opposition was required to remedy what was intolerable. Writing in 1973, on the topic of academic freedom, Arblaster (1973:9) probably captured the views of many of his colleagues on the radical Left:

A society which constantly advertises itself as free and democratic manages to tolerate an extraordinary degree of authoritarianism within almost all its major institutions. This contradiction between pretensions and practice is unlikely to last indefinitely. Sooner or later a choice will have to be made between greater freedom and democracy, or less. There are signs that our rulers have already made their choice – for repression. The rest of us have to decide whether to accept this or to resist. At the moment, in direct response to various forms of popular discontent, Britain is becoming less free. The 'system' is tightening up.

Partly because of the student revolts of 1968, education came to be one of the key fields of political debate in the 1970s and 80s. On one side were progressive or radical educators, including advocates of de-schooling and of children's rights, who denounced existing forms of schooling, or indeed schools *per se*, as anti-educational (see Kozol 1967; Herndon 1970; Holt 1970; Illich 1971; Reimer 1971; Lister 1974). On the other side were both defenders of traditional kinds of education and those who demanded that it should be more closely shaped to the needs of the economy. In the UK, the defenders of traditional education produced a series of 'Black Papers', published from the late 1960s onwards, that gained considerable influence (Cox and Dyson 1971). Some Black Paper writers viewed sociology as little more than left-wing ideology (though there were one or two sociologists amongst them), and believed it to have played a major role in the rise of progressivism in schools, especially through its influence within teacher education institutions.<sup>15</sup> Given this, it is

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our generation has difficulty in sensing, though it understands it in the abstract. Having lived through the collapse of societies he understands their fragility. He realizes that once fundamental instability sets in, nothing can stop it'. Above all, we can perhaps detect the influence here of the ghostly image of Weimar Germany, whose collapse had haunted liberals and social democrats of earlier generations.

<sup>14</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that Gould went on to play an important role among the Radical Right, for example becoming Chairman of the Trustees of the Social Affairs Unit, a think tank founded in 1980, originally under the auspices of the Institute of Economic Affairs. For an outline of Gould's political trajectory and views, see Gould 1980. Similarly, Caroline Cox was appointed as a 'working peer' in the House of Lords by Margaret Thatcher, and has subsequently been involved in Right-wing think tanks.

<sup>15</sup> An important event at the time was the national scandal over events at the William Tyndale primary school in 1974-5. See Gretton and Jackson 1971 and Dale 1981.

perhaps not surprising that the sociology of education should have become a target of criticism.

### **The sociology of education in the 1970s**

In the UK, work in the sociology of education during the 1950s and 60s had been concerned primarily with processes of selection and differential achievement within the education system, in particular with the causes of working-class underachievement. Much of it was focused at a macro level, looking at aggregate relations between social class, various features of children's home backgrounds, and educational outcomes (see, for example, Floud et al 1956; Halsey et al 1961), though there was also work examining processes *within* schools that were held to exacerbate social class inequalities in educational achievement (see Douglas 1964; Jackson 1964; Hargreaves 1967; Lacey 1970).<sup>16</sup> This research was largely framed in terms of a commitment to equality of educational opportunity. While, in political terms, this principle was particularly associated with the Centre Left, it was a commitment that could be found on both sides of the political spectrum, albeit in somewhat different forms: differences arose primarily over what 'equality of opportunity' meant, and how it could and should be increased – especially over whether grammar and secondary modern schools ought to be abolished and replaced by comprehensive schools, and over streaming, particularly in primary schools.

However, towards the end of the 1960s, and into the early 1970s, there was a sea-change in the sociology of education in the UK, prompted in large part by the influence of the student movement and radical critics of education, by the revived influence of Marxism associated with this, and by changes within Anglo-American sociology.<sup>17</sup> There had been increasing criticism of the dominant functionalist approaches within US sociology, for being preoccupied with the preservation of social order. This had led to the development of various forms of 'conflict sociology' (Coser 1956; Dahrendorf 1959; Collins 1975), emphasizing the ubiquity, and sometimes the value, of social conflict. This was followed by growth in the influence of symbolic interactionism and critical sociology, exemplified by the work of Becker (1970) and Gouldner (1970), respectively. Both of these emphasized the agency of individuals and groups, as against the emphasis in so much previous sociology (and in some forms of Marxism) on the degree to which action is determined by social structures. In addition, the 'alternative curriculum' generated by the student movement brought in key figures of Western Marxism, notably Lukacs, Gramsci, and Marcuse, and also the very different kind of Marxism being developed by Althusser and his students in Paris (see Cockburn and Blackburn 1969, Blackburn 1972, Pateman 1972, Connerton 1976).

To a large extent, previous discussion of the nature and role of education in society had operated within the broad assumption, across Right and Left, that

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<sup>16</sup> In addition, attention was starting to be given to other topics, for example schools as organizations and teaching as a profession (Hoyle 1965, 1969 and 1973, Shipman 1968).

<sup>17</sup> Somewhat similar changes also occurred in several other areas of sociology, notably in the study of deviance (see Cohen 1971; Taylor and Taylor 1973).

schooling is desirable – that it serves as a civilising or progressive force.<sup>18</sup> However, this assumption came to be questioned and indeed rejected by many younger sociologists (see Young and Whitty 1977:1). Moreover, there were increased numbers of them, as a result of the establishment of new universities during the 1960s, along with the growth of sociology in UK universities generally (see Halsey 2004:chs 5 and 6), and because of an increase in the number of sociology of education courses stemming from changes to the teacher education curriculum (Tibble 1966; Reid and Wormald 1974).

In more specific terms, the shift in attitude within the sociology of education involved the following elements:

1. Previously it had been taken for granted that the knowledge and skills presented in schools were of value and were legitimate. Very often this assumption was underpinned by a contrast between the knowledge and enlightenment that schools offered and the cultural deficit to be found in many homes, especially those of working class families. The new sociologists' reaction to this assumption was either to suspend it, at least for the purposes of analysis, or completely to reject it, for example arguing that, in fact, schooling amounted to the imposition of an alien culture on working class children and/or that it constrained autonomous and creative learning.
2. Relatedly, where previously debate had been concerned with whether academic ability is primarily determined by heredity or by environment, questions were now opened up about what counted as ability in the education system, and whether this was simply constructed by that system for its own purposes, or for those of the wider society, rather than having inherent, universal value.
3. Similarly, the need for teachers and schools to maintain discipline over students had previously simply been assumed to be necessary, but now this came to be regarded by some as the exercise of arbitrary power and as a breach of children's rights. Progressive and free schools were sometimes cited as showing that standard forms of discipline were neither essential nor desirable.<sup>19</sup>
4. Previously, the focus in the sociology of education had been on how psychological and social variables produce inequalities. Now, deterministic assumptions of both psychological and social kinds came to be questioned. It was argued that these institutions can only operate in and through the activities of individual actors, and are therefore open to fundamental change. The major obstacle to this was held to be the ideological assumptions into which teachers and others in the education system had been socialized; so that, for some

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<sup>18</sup> This was even true of some Marxists such as Simon: see Rattansi and Reeder 1992:20-3. For them, the key issue, as for most of the earlier sociologists of education, was differential access to education, especially access to academic secondary schooling.

<sup>19</sup> It is important to note that the level and discipline, and the means of punishment, in schools were somewhat different then than they are now. Teachers were still allowed to cane and slipper children, though usually such events had to be recorded. It is also to be noted that the meaning of 'free school' was different then than it is today in the UK.

sociologists, the main task became subjecting those assumptions to critique, thereby preparing the way for an educational revolution.<sup>20</sup>

The ‘new sociology of education’ was quite diverse, but these four ideas were especially important for a key group of sociologists centred on the Institute of Education in London (see Young 1970).<sup>21</sup> One of these, Geoff Esland, subsequently moved to The Open University, where a new Education Faculty was being established (the OU was founded in 1969). He was joined at the OU by some other members of the younger generation of sociologists of education: Roger Dale and Ben Cosin. Along with the head of department, Don Swift, whose work belonged to the older tradition, and with the assistance of various consultants, they produced the first Open University sociology of education course – E282 *School and Society*. Some of the material they contributed to this course exemplified important features of the ‘new sociology’, and became extremely influential in shaping the teaching of the subject in other institutions, and in setting a new research agenda within the sub-discipline.

This course used *Knowledge and Control* (Young 1970) as a set text, a book produced by sociologists at the London Institute – Esland was one of the contributors. It was very influential among sociologists of education but was also subject to some severe criticism. For example, the philosopher Antony Flew (1976:ch2) argued that the new approach it presented failed to distinguish between a quite reasonable suspension of belief in the validity of *particular* knowledge claims, in the value of *specific* forms of education, etc, on the one hand, and, on the other, the argument, or implication, that, because the knowledge included in the school curriculum can be shown to be socially selected and produced, its validity is necessarily doubtful and its inclusion in the curriculum unjustifiable. He argued that the elision between these two arguments was central to *Knowledge and Control*, singling out Esland’s work for particular criticism and suggesting that it had anti-educational implications.<sup>22</sup>

In the mid-1970s, the time came for E282 to be re-made.<sup>23</sup> Some significant developments were emerging within the new sociology of education that were critical of initial versions (see Bernstein 1975; Sharp and Green 1976; Whitty 1977; Sharp 1980, 1981). New themes included the argument that the constraints operating on teachers had been under-played, and that even progressive forms of education served to reproduce social divisions; indeed, that they were perhaps more effective in this than were traditional kinds of education. In addition, in searching for new material for the course, some members of the Team – notably Esland and Dale – became strongly

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<sup>20</sup> This emphasis on the role of ideology and critique had been characteristic of much Western Marxism.

<sup>21</sup> Many were postgraduate students there, subsequently obtaining posts at other institutions. Goldsmiths College became another outpost of the new sociology of education (see Moore 2009:ch4). For an account of the various new strands in educational research in Britain at the time, see Atkinson et al 1993.

<sup>22</sup> As noted earlier, Jacka et al (1975:37-8) also criticized E282 for its relativism and the likely effect of this on teachers.

<sup>23</sup> A third level course, E352 Education, Economy and Politics dealing with macro aspects of the sociology of education had also been produced. New members were added to the sociology of education group at the OU in this period: Donald Mackinnon, who had been involved in E282, was appointed as a lecturer, and others joined as well: Peter Woods, and then Ken Giles, Madeleine MacDonald (now Arnot), and Ray Woolfe. I also joined the OU around this time. This resulted in a larger course team for E202 that was even more diverse in orientation than the previous one.

influenced by work in the US, in particular that of Bowles and Gintis (1976) on the political economy of schooling, and the writings of radical historians, concerned with the way in which schooling had developed so as to establish and maintain social control. This led to a significant change in their approach to the sociology of education.

There had been early criticism of the new sociology of education for blaming teachers, but in this emerging mutation of the new sociology of education teachers came to be portrayed, to a large extent, as victims of the system just as much as were their pupils. Furthermore, it was argued that any substantial change in schooling would require a transformation of society away from capitalism. This amounted to abandoning, or at least significantly modifying, the anti-determinist approach of earlier work in the new sociology of education, and the optimism that fundamental educational change could be brought about primarily through raising the consciousness of teachers.<sup>24</sup>

### **E202 and *Schooling and Capitalism***

Within the Course Team it was eventually agreed that the first block of the new course was to be devoted to setting the theoretical scene as regards the way in which the school system functions in the UK. It came to consist of units on ‘Mass schooling’, ‘Legitimacy and Control’, ‘The Structural Context of Teaching’, and ‘Schooling and Pedagogy’, written by Roger Dale and Geoff Esland. They, along with Madeleine MacDonald, were also the editors of the first Reader – *Schooling and Capitalism* – containing articles that were to be set reading for this Block, and for some later parts of the course. This was the Reader that was critically reviewed by Gould. I will focus here primarily on this Reader, since this was all that was available to Gould and other critics at the time. In fact, parts of the Course had still not been completed when he wrote his review.<sup>25</sup>

In the Introduction to the book, the editors declare that much sociology has been concerned with critique of social institutions, and that ‘proposed solutions to problems of social stability, of social improvement and social change have more often than not [had] educational policies at their core’. This was the rationale for why E202 began with a critical assessment of the UK education system. The editors then go on to outline the distinctive perspective they have adopted – which came to be labeled ‘reproduction theory’:

Under a capitalist mode of production there is an unequal distribution of power. It is therefore in the interest of those who hold power to ensure the perpetuation of capitalism. The maintenance of existing social relations of production is crucial and is achieved not only through direct work experience but also through the whole range of social institutions which take their basic form from the contribution they make to such reproduction. This collection of

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<sup>24</sup> This shift paralleled the arguments of some Leftist groups amongst schoolteachers at the time.

<sup>25</sup> However it is worth noting that that he clearly had had access to further information about the course, because he mentions the block titles, which were not listed in the Reader, and provides some information about the hours devoted to different parts of the course. This information may have been available in the OU’s undergraduate course prospectus.

papers is assembled to show how the capitalist mode of production influences one social institution, schooling. (Dale et al 1976:1)

Later, the editors elaborate on this final point, declaring that ‘the rationale for this collection of articles’ is to provide ‘a critique’ of ‘liberal ideology’. According to this ideology, schooling is principally concerned with enabling all children to realize their potential, irrespective of social class background. The editors present this ideology not just as false but also as serving to legitimise capitalist relations of production, and the operation of the education system in the service of these relations. They continue:

Perhaps the single most important plank of the liberal ideology of education is that education creates and sustains progressive social change. This faith rests on a number of critical assumptions. It is basically from a belief that these assumptions are not valid that we have assembled this collection of readings, the majority of which start from a similar belief. (Dale et al 1976:1)

The editors outline the key liberal assumptions they are challenging in more detailed terms as follows:

1. That in providing an educated and trained workforce schooling facilitates technological and economic growth;
2. That education can redress social inequality through allowing upward mobility, in other words creating meritocracy;
3. That the knowledge and culture transmitted by the education system has intrinsic value.

So the argument here is that liberal views of the purpose and character of education serve as an ideological disguise for the ways in which the education system *actually* operates to reproduce the unequal social relations of capitalist production, which it does by means of both selection and socialization. In other words, the key function of schooling under capitalism is, in fact, the provision of ‘different types of people’ suitable for playing the various roles demanded by the capitalist economy, indeed people who are ‘attuned to working contentedly under that mode of production’ (Dale et al 1976:2). And it is argued that the ‘hidden curriculum’, rather than the official curriculum, is the key factor in this process of social control.

In the next section I will examine Gould’s criticisms of the Reader, and of the Course more generally. These seem to focus primarily on what is in the Introduction to the Reader, but I will bring in discussion of some other parts of this book and of the Course, where relevant.

### **Julius Gould’s review**

Gould begins by noting that Open University teaching materials are particularly deserving of close attention: since they carry the seal of academic approval and are in

the public domain, thereby being very influential.<sup>26</sup> He mentions criticisms of OU sociology courses that had arisen in the previous year, before asserting the centrality of the sociology of knowledge to the new sociology of education, which he takes this Reader to represent. He cites Flew's criticism of this new sociology as 'anti-educational' and as 'incompatible with basic presuppositions both of science in general and of the social sciences in particular' (Flew 1976:34; cited in Gould 1977a:20). He goes on to argue that the chapters of the Reader he is reviewing are 'united in the central over-riding theme – that of hostility to what it calls “capitalism” and the “liberal ideology of education”, which the editors announce is intimately linked with “capitalism”’.

After quoting the editors to the effect that capitalism involves an unequal distribution of power, and that it is in the interests of those with power to perpetuate capitalism, he complains that there is no mention in the Course of inequalities in non-capitalist societies and of the interest that non-capitalist power holders have in perpetuating their power.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, he argues that 'a socialist system of production aims at producing its own special version of “contented personalities” – content, furthermore, with rulers who deny them the political freedoms enjoyed under liberal capitalism, freedoms exercised, not least, by Open University teachers' (Gould 1977b).<sup>28</sup> What we have here is a substantive criticism of one of the central claims of reproduction theory, as represented in the Introduction to the Reader, plus an attack on the OU academics concerned for failing to recognize the distinctive freedoms a liberal state accords them.

The starting point for Gould's critique, then, is a challenge to the soundness of the central claims made in the Reader Introduction: in particular he argues that what are treated as distinctive features of capitalism are also features of other types of social system. Moreover, he believes that this mis-attribution is not simply an error but is the effect of a bias against capitalism on the part of the Editors. In addition, he points to what seems to be an important assumption of their position: that it is objectionable 'for power to be “unequally distributed” and that allegedly capitalist forms of such “inequality” are shameful or shady'. He declares that these are 'tired commonplaces of Marxist polemic'. As part of this, he asserts the value of a liberal concern with narrowing material inequalities, even when this does not eliminate them completely. In effect, he is complaining here that the UK education system, and the wider society, are being criticized for failing to realize a utopian ideal that no other system has approximated, or could approximate; and whose desirable character is, in some respects, open to question.

Gould goes on to raise questions about the claimed closeness of the links between the social relations of production and forms of knowledge and education prevalent in a society, again linking these to a questioning of the integrity of the OU

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<sup>26</sup> This is a point he also makes in his report, where he criticizes another OU course along the same lines: D302 *Patterns of Inequality* (Gould 1977b:39).

<sup>27</sup> This parallels a complaint on the part of proponents of 'the end of ideology'. Discussing the work of Aron, Anderson (1997:4-5) notes his accusation of bad faith against Sartre and others: 'Western societies were excoriated for their every injustice (and what society, Aron would ask, has not been unjust?) while the socialist world was judged on the basis of its ostensibly good *intentions*'.

<sup>28</sup> This is a point that also echoes Aron, who pointed out that had Sartre lived in the Soviet Union he would probably have been sent to the Gulag (Anderson 1998:5).

academics involved. He argues that: ‘Only people cocooned in the self-justifying web of Marxist faith should leap to that conclusion [that all knowledge in a society is deformed by the ‘relations of production’]: it is no part of the business of the Open (or any other) University to pass off their faith as scientific truth, even when individual teachers (or departments) may find that faith either appealing or soothing’. Here, again, he is ascribing what he takes to be erroneous claims made by the Editors to defective thinking: to a reliance on faith rather than on a scientific approach. Moreover, he insists that this is especially inappropriate in a university course, thereby challenging its legitimacy.

From this he moves on to a related pedagogical point. He writes: ‘one hopes that when [the Course’s] students argue about these commonplaces they will not be regarded or treated as deviant cases, dupes of the capitalist system to be made healthy by the reiteration, or regurgitation, of their teachers’ simple wisdom’. Along the same lines, he remarks that: ‘The editors spend no time in discussing the notorious difficulties of the Marxist theory of “determinism” – again we hope that [...] students will not swallow or treat with undue deference this alternative to “liberalism”’ (Gould 1977b).

Gould explicitly denies he is proposing that Marxism should not be included in university courses, indeed he indicates that it forms part of his own teaching. He states that what is important for him is that it should not be the only perspective offered, and that it ought not to be presented in an uncritical manner. He sees the E202 course as failing to meet both these requirements. He writes: ‘Placed right at the beginning of the course of study [The Open University Block on Schooling and Capitalism] preempts, via its concepts and its materials, the attention of its students in the service of one perspective without an adequate discussion of alternatives’. And he concludes: ‘what service is rendered to a student by setting up early in a course of study, a model of a virtuous, non-problematic Marxism against a straw-man “liberalism” upon which every form of social grievance and alienation can be so readily projected? My own answer is that this procedure – now visible in more than one Open University course – constitutes a disservice both to the university and to its students’. This comment, along with some others, seemed to be calculated to force the University into making a formal response to his critique. It involves a move from what we might call academic to political criticism: he is no longer simply questioning the validity of the arguments presented in the Reader, or even just the academic competence of the editors, but rather calling on the Open University to account for failing (on his view) to meet its public duties. In other words, the Course is presented as beyond the pale, as not to be tolerated.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> The OU was particularly vulnerable to public criticism at this time because, unlike other universities, it was directly funded by the Department of Education and Science, and there had been vociferous critics of it from the start (Tunstall 1974; for a recent history of the OU see Weinbren 2014). Lurking behind Gould’s critique was the belief, made explicit in his Report, that what was involved here was an organized attempt to subvert British society from within. As I noted earlier, this idea underpinned efforts in the 1950s by the CIA to counter the threat of Soviet subversion of Western intellectual culture: Crozier’s ‘secret war for people’s minds’. Around this time, Margaret Thatcher reputedly described the Open University as ‘a nest of Marxists’ (Beckett 2009:427).

## The impact of the criticism

Gould's critique was reported in a number of national newspapers, including *The Times*, *The Guardian*, and *The Daily Telegraph*, and mentioned on some radio news programmes. And there were letters in subsequent issues of the *TES* (Letters 18.2.77 and 4.3.77), both criticizing and supporting him. Gould's ISC report appeared soon after his review, and this too contained criticism of E202, as well as broader criticism of the sociology of education, and of other areas of academic work; though, in fact, most of what was said about E202 was extracted from the original *TES* article. Publication of this report also attracted attention in the newspapers.<sup>30</sup> For example, there was an article by the political scientist Bernard Crick in *The Observer*. Crick does not mention E202, but his discussion provides an interesting insight into what we might call mainstream views at the time. He writes that 'Professor Gould's critique of Marxist "Critical Philosophy" itself so religiously uncritical, is excellent; and his scorn for the generalities of a new subject called "Sociology of Education" is widely shared'.<sup>31</sup> However, Crick describes *both* those whom Gould is criticizing *and* Gould and his associates as extremists, and as sharing a strong tendency to dogmatism. Crick writes: 'His apparent paranoia is really an hypothesis based upon a theory – a theory every bit as overly systematic and as overly economic as Marxism; simply the liberal theory of the market'. What we have, Crick suggests, is 'neo-liberal extremists' confronting Marxists, commenting: 'Let the extremists eat each other (intellectually speaking). They certainly flatter the political importance of each other's actions compared to the real intellectual interest of their words'. And he dismisses Gould's concern about Marxist penetration of the universities, suggesting that it is greatly exaggerated.

Meanwhile, *The Guardian* published a report by their education correspondent that Lord Robbins (1977), neo-classical economist and Chair of the committee whose report had led to the expansion of universities in the 1960s, 'backed' Gould's report as "a splendid example of the sort of argument and persuasion needed" to safeguard free inquiry'. It quotes him as saying that 'if the argument is clearly stated for that middle region between Nazism and totalitarian Communism I refuse to believe that there are not a great many people among the younger generation who will realize where the danger lies'. This may well be typical of the framework within which many in the older generation among the Centre Right viewed the radical movement in universities at the time.

Within the OU, a committee was set up, chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, to assess the Course and to consider the implications for University policy; though its proceedings were initially suspended until writing of the Course had been completed.<sup>32</sup> As part of this process, the external assessor for the course, Frank

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<sup>30</sup> There was also a response from the Council for Academic Freedom and Democracy (nd), with contributions by various academics, including a piece by the editors of *Schooling and Capitalism* entitled 'Professor Gould and the Open University'. However, this received little media attention.

<sup>31</sup> Crick was apparently unaware that this was *not* a new subject.

<sup>32</sup> There were also some changes subsequently made to the Course. A revision unit discussing Blocks 1 and 2 was introduced, and a revision unit explicitly discussing whether or not social research can or should be value-neutral, and the positions taken on this in the Course, was included as Unit 24. Gould's review article was circulated to students, and there was also a radio programme made in which two members of the Course Team, Esland and myself, and one of the block assessors, Brian Davies, were

Musgrove, then professor of education at the University of Manchester, was asked to produce a special report on the Course addressing the issue of bias. He praised the course but also insisted that it was biased, and that he had brought this to the Course Team's attention. However, he argued that this should not be viewed as 'solemnly' as Gould had done, suggesting that it could be corrected by including more of the opposing perspective, for example by setting a book such as Andreski's *Social Science as Sorcery* or Flew's *Sociology, Equality and Education*.<sup>33</sup> He also wrote that 'Gould's piece in the T.E.S. is, of course, thoroughly dishonest. Ostensibly a review of the reader, *Schooling and Capitalism*, it attacks a course which is not yet finally written'. But he goes on to say 'Nevertheless, he is making points which I myself have made which are not only substantive but methodological' And he outlines these, arguing for example that 'the early Marxist units' are 'intellectually ramshackle: there simply wasn't the evidence for the conclusions about capitalism and its consequences for schooling that was claimed' (p4). Later he remarks 'it does not bother me in any ethical sense that the course is deeply and consistently subversive, a sustained attack on the status quo. Which it is (I think the modern university is perhaps necessarily and properly the home of an adversary culture); but I am bothered in an intellectual way by a demolition job which must be assuming alternative structures, but never says (at least by Unit 26) what they are' (p12).<sup>34</sup>

In the wake of the public controversy, and during the course of the internal inquiry, in August of 1977, a debate was published in the OU student newspaper, *Sesame*, between Julius Gould and Geoff Esland, under the headline 'E202 Bias or Smear?' In his contribution, under the strapline 'Marxism should not expect special treatment', Gould rejects any defence that the Reader was only one small part of the Course. He also repeats the point that he is not objecting to Marxist analysis as such: 'what one is saying is that if Marxist analysis is conducted (as it can be but need not always be) in such a way as to produce an inaccurate or false account of reality, then that Marxist account should be challenged' (Gould 1977c:7). He denies that he was arguing that such an account should be suppressed, claiming that he was only proposing that it should be open to criticism. However, he goes on, quoting fellow sociologist Donald MacRae, to state that Marxism is 'an assertion of knowledge prior to investigation' and that this should not be 'confused with social science'. He suggests that 'what is special about Marxism is a tendency to regard "objectivity" and "truth" as bourgeois illusions', and thereby to slip into a form of relativism. He writes 'the best of Marxist writings are, of course, sensitive to this problem – but vulgar Marxism teeters on the tightrope proclaiming *both* that its dogmas are scientific "knowledge" (prior to investigation) *and* that other people are blinded by bourgeois "false consciousness"'. Finally, shifting to pedagogical issues he writes that:

Any academic institution has, in the last analysis, to make up its mind where it stands with regard to such "bourgeois illusions". To believe that truth is many-sided: that students should be exposed to many-sided schemes of analysis and

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to discuss the issue of bias. However, Esland arrived too late to be included: the programme had to be recorded in one take because it was scheduled to be broadcast the next day.

<sup>33</sup> This was not done, but in fact there were already some materials in the course that directly challenged the radical line, notably Edwards and Hargreaves 1976.

<sup>34</sup> The implication is that he had himself only read up to Unit 26, the remaining units had probably not yet been completed. Units 30 and 31 dealt with 'liberal' and 'radical' alternatives.

study: that education is more than a way of canalizing social grievances and alienation – these are among the central tenets of academic responsibility.

Here, once again, he seems to move into political criticism of the Open University for allowing the course to proceed in its present state, thereby implying the need for its suppression.

Esland's contribution appeared under the strapline 'All knowledge is based on political structures'. He argued that 'in spite of his professions of liberalism and a desire to encourage "open debate" in which Marxist theories have a place, Professor Gould must be aware that the kind of reaction he has helped to create produces pressures for more control over radical ideas and more academic censorship'. He accuses Gould of 'smearing Marxist theories as lacking genuine academic status so that control is created through the setting up of watchdog committees to safeguard academic "standards"'. He claims that the parts of the course materials that have been accused of bias are a 'minute fraction' of the whole, continuing:

in view of the increasing importance of developments in Marxist theory which are coming to the fore in a number of academic disciplines it could be argued that if there is a bias at all in the OU's output it is an overwhelmingly conservative one. In all other courses in the Educational Studies Faculty, for example, Marxist analyses of education hardly get more than a mention.

Esland goes on to challenge the 'pretence' that other theoretical approaches are separate from 'politics, social and organizational interests, and ideology', suggesting that what is distinctive about Marxism is that it 'explicitly identifies the political basis of its analysis'. And its central task is 'that of making visible the structural relationships between academic "products" of various kinds and the "economic and political structures" of society'. He concludes with the charge that 'Professor Gould appears to want to exclude criticism of the practices and structures of our own society from teaching material given to OU students' and that he is encouraging 'political censorship of academic practice'.

### **Assessing the arguments**

The debate about E202 involved a range of issues, these not always being clearly distinguished or well-formulated. One concerned the validity of specific factual claims made in the introduction to the *Schooling and Capitalism* Reader, in its other chapters, and beyond this in some parts of the Course as a whole. A second theme was the character and status of Marxism, and its relationship to social science. How far can it be treated as equivalent to other sociological perspectives? A third issue concerned how students should be taught sociology, and whether E202 matched up to this: Gould argues that a plurality of perspectives ought to be presented, and that these should be taught in ways that encourage students critically to assess them. Finally, there is the question of what should and should not be tolerated. This is an issue that is particularly difficult for liberalism. Moreover, answers to this question may vary according to whether the concern is with what should be tolerated in a university (the issue of academic freedom) or more generally. This final issue was perhaps seen as especially significant in the case of E202 because it was an education course that

would be studied by several thousand teachers.<sup>35</sup> These issues are all worth careful consideration, and I will look at each in turn.

### *The validity of reproduction theory*

In writing the Introduction to their Reader, Dale et al were presenting a rationale for its contents, and for the opening block of E202. Their starting point is that if we are to understand what goes on in schools and classrooms we must examine this in the context of wider social processes. This is a proposal that would have been characteristic of several other sociological perspectives at the time, not just Marxist ones. Nevertheless, it was in tension with an influential argument within the new sociology of education which emphasised the need to understand micro-social processes in local contexts, for example through ethnographic work. There were two aspects to this argument: that evidence from such work is essential for reliable conclusions to be reached, that all else is speculation; and that even if what happens in local contexts *is* shaped by macro-factors their effects are highly mediated by local circumstances, so that these must be investigated in depth. Indeed, advocates of this position sometimes raised questions about the validity of *any* macro theory. In the second block of E202, which focused specifically on ‘social interaction and the perspectives of participants in schools’ (Hammersley and Woods 1977:3), the opening unit, on ethnography, quoted the American sociologist Jack Douglas as saying ‘we must stop treating macroanalyses as if they were scientific arguments, that is, arguments based on carefully done, systematic observations of concrete phenomena’ (Douglas 1970:11; Woods 1977b:10). Of course, what is offered in the Introduction to *Schooling and Capitalism*, and in many of its chapters, was, and remains, a highly controversial account of how schooling is shaped by wider social processes, and how it serves them; it is not one that would have been accepted even by many of those who regarded macro-theory as essential, including some members of the Course Team.

If we turn to the specifics of the account Dale et al provide, perhaps the best way of characterizing it is that it represents an internal or immanent critique. The argument is that the UK education system does not live up to its own liberal ideals.<sup>36</sup> And an explanation is offered for this failure: that UK schools operate within a capitalist system that requires them to serve functions that are at odds with those ideals. This means that, while presenting themselves as pursuing liberal ideals, such as realizing the potential of all children, in practice schools are primarily concerned with allocating children to different levels of educational achievement, largely on the basis of their social class background, and socializing them into conformity with the requirements of employment and citizenship, as these are defined by current social

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<sup>35</sup> This was a concern that had been mentioned by Jacka et al (1975:44) in their criticism of E282. Later in their book, discussing the situation in West German universities at the time, they comment that ‘one of the first moves [on the part of Leftist radicals] after conquering a university is to re-cast the courses for the training of school-teachers so that they will graduate as revolutionary fighters, able to instruct their young pupils in the art of waging war against their parents, their future employers and all other representatives of “the system”’. See also Dawson 1981. However, E202 was not directly involved in a teacher training programme – no such programme existed in the OU at the time.

<sup>36</sup> Jacka et al (1975:132) describe this as a general tactic: ‘to undermine an institution by using its own foundation values against it, and by enlisting as inadvertent allies in this work of destruction persons who are themselves convinced liberals’. However, such immanent criticism is surely legitimate: it is an important means of socio-political assessment and reform. What is crucial is how it is done.

arrangements. So, in fact, schools allow pupils only very limited freedom, and give them little opportunity to escape their social class origins. Meanwhile, the promotion of liberal ideology disguises this mismatch between the manifest and latent functions of the education system.<sup>37</sup>

It is probably this preoccupation with immanent critique that generated the lack of comparative analysis about which Gould complained, and the associated failure to present accurately what is and is not distinctive to capitalist societies.<sup>38</sup> Of course, questions can be raised about whether such critique is a legitimate component of sociology. While Dale et al noted that much sociology had taken this form, by no means all of it had, and there have been arguments against this orientation, going back at least to Max Weber. This raises the question of whether a sociology of education course should have been concerned with evaluating the UK education system, rather than focusing solely on understanding and explaining its character, how it operates and its effects. Rather than pursuing that issue here, I will consider instead how the critique offered in *Schooling and Capitalism* might be assessed.<sup>39</sup>

Several questions are in order here. The first is whether the account of ‘liberal ideology’ that the editors (and other contributors to *Schooling and Capitalism*) put forward is an accurate portrayal of the ideals or goals that the UK education system actually claimed to be serving. The answer to this, I suggest, is that the three principles that the editors identify – to do with enhancing economic growth, increasing upward social mobility, and facilitating personal development – provide a reasonably comprehensive account of the goals that were frequently mentioned in public statements about education in the 1970s (and indeed they continue to be central today). But we should also note that the first of these goals relates quite closely to what the editors claim is the *hidden* function of schooling: serving the capitalist economy. From this it may be suggested that the contradiction that the authors claim exists between the education system’s manifest and latent functions actually lies instead *amongst* the explicit goals that schools were supposed to pursue. Moreover, it was not uncommon at the time for liberals to recognize that their ideals could be in conflict with one another, so that compromises amongst them had to be made. Indeed, they often insisted that recognition of the plurality of values, and of their conflictual nature, is one of the distinguishing and beneficial features of liberalism, as against ideologies that purport to reconcile all human values in a single inclusive and internally coherent system, Marxism being regarded as one of these.<sup>40</sup> They also insisted that it is rarely a matter of either realising one ideal or another but rather of finding a satisfactory compromise amongst multiple concerns.

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<sup>37</sup> This overall argument is elaborated in Bowles and Gintis’s (1976) *Schooling in Capitalist America*, a set book for the Course. On the distinction between manifest and latent functions, see Merton 1968:ch3.

<sup>38</sup> It is also the case that, at the time, OU students would have been primarily concerned with the education system in the UK, and rather less interested in what happens in other societies; though, in fact, many chapters in the *Schooling and Capitalism* Reader relate to the US, as does the Bowles and Gintis (1976) set book. There were also television programmes focusing on Portugal.

<sup>39</sup> I have addressed elsewhere the general issue of whether social science can be normative or should instead operate under the principle of value neutrality, see for example Hammersley 2014a. It is important to recognise that this principle only requires neutrality towards practical or political values, and only in relation to carrying out data collection and analysis and the reporting of findings.

<sup>40</sup> The classic texts here are those of Isaiah Berlin, see for example Berlin 1978, 1990, and Gray 1995a.

A second question about the immanent critique put forward in *Schooling and Capitalism* concerns whether sufficient evidence is provided for the claims made about the operation of the UK education system: to the effect that it selects on the basis of social class origin and socializes children into the requirements of capitalism. The answer, in my judgment, is that the evidence offered was insufficient, in the Reader and for that matter in the Course. Furthermore, finding adequate evidence would have been very difficult if not impossible at the time. More relevant evidence has been produced since the 1970s, but in my view this still leaves us a considerable way from being able to make reliable judgments about how far these claims are accurate, and it is clear that (at the very least) the processes involved are more complex and uncertain than the account presented in the Reader and Block 1 of the course suggested (Foster et al 1996).<sup>41</sup>

A third question about the critique concerns how we are to judge the seriousness of any shortfall between liberal goals and what is actually achieved. It could reasonably be argued that ideals are, by their nature, never fully realized, and that this is especially so when there is conflict amongst them, *but that approximation to them is nevertheless still worthwhile*. What this makes clear is that the issue is not whether or not liberal goals have been fully achieved, but whether the degree of failure in realizing those goals (or particular ones amongst them) is greater than could reasonably have been expected in the circumstances. This requires some subtlety in assessment.

It is here, interestingly, that comparative analysis could have played a role in the critique. The following questions might have been asked: have societies with a centrally run economy been more successful in achieving these goals? Or, at least, has their progress towards realizing them been more promising? There would, of course, have been considerable difficulties in carrying out such comparative analysis. For one thing, there are problems intrinsic to comparing societies that differ in many potentially relevant respects. Furthermore, there would have been a lack of much relevant data. However, it could perhaps have been tentatively concluded, for example, that the level of meritocracy was higher in the Soviet Union, but that there was actually less freedom there for children in schools than in the UK (Grant 1968). As Gould indicates, we also need to ask about the price that was paid in other respects for any educational benefits produced by the communist system.

Of course, even at that time, many on the Left viewed the Soviet Union, and its East European satellites, as representing a state capitalist system, and therefore would not have seen them as providing a useful comparative standard.<sup>42</sup> China and Cuba were alternatives that were looked on more favourably in some quarters, though even worse problems would have been faced in trying to use these societies for

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<sup>41</sup> The major source of evidence offered in the course was Bowles and Gintis's (1976) book. However, not only does this relate to the US, rather than the UK, but their analysis has been subjected to cogent criticism, in theoretical, empirical, and methodological terms (see Heilbroner 1976; Demaine 1981:ch5; Blackledge and Hunt 1985:134-50). While they themselves regard their claims about the role of the education system in the United States to have been vindicated by subsequent research (Bowles and Gintis 2002), there continue to be serious theoretical and methodological doubts about this (see, for example, Cole 1988).

<sup>42</sup> This is the position taken by Bowles and Gintis (1976:57).

comparison.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, these too could be rejected as inappropriate models, on political grounds. Yet it must be recognised that if there are no actual societies that do approximate more closely than the UK and the US to the ideal, the critique is weakened because its realism is opened up to question. While there is the possibility that radical change in the future could facilitate realization of these ideals to a greater extent than currently, it is unclear what sort of evidence there could be to justify this assumption. As we shall see, it seems to rely heavily upon a questionable historical-philosophical meta-narrative.

A further question is: should we assume that, on its own, any shortfall between ideal and reality justifies the conclusion that *radical* economic and political change is required for improvement to be achieved? Might not more piecemeal measures improve the situation? My point here is not that the conclusion that radical social and economic change is essential was false but rather that this issue needed to be explored. Furthermore, it could reasonably be suggested that, before reaching the conclusion that such change is necessary, its potential costs must be considered. This was a key element of the argument put forward by proponents of the end of ideology thesis in their critique of Marxism, often on the basis of their own experience of radical politics, and knowledge of what had happened in the Soviet Union.

#### *The character of Marxism and its relationship to social science*

At best, there is ambivalence towards Marxism on the part of Gould: he believes that it should be included in sociology courses but that it must be subject to a critical assessment that indicates the respects in which some versions of it are at odds with the very notion of social science. Jacka et al (1975:43) make a related point, they write: ‘we expect the academy to discuss with care the doctrines of Marx, as of any other important thinker. But this is completely different from the lecturer’s use of the classroom as a forum for propagating Marxism, either by openly advocating it, or by giving a consistent and extreme bias to the presentation of Marxist views’. There is a problem here not just in that judgment is required about what would constitute bias, but also that this statement apparently implies that a Marxist analysis cannot be advocated even if the lecturer has come to the conclusion that it offers the most convincing explanations. Of course, there has always been some tension in the relationship between Marxism and social science. A major source of this has been the former’s commitment to the unity of theory and practice – though it should be noted that some social science has been committed to this as well, in one form or another, and that Marxists have varied considerably in how practically engaged in revolutionary politics they have been. Questions arise here about the nature of academic research and teaching, ones that are matters of dispute.

There was a common tendency among social scientists in the 1950s and 60s to try to extract the sociological core of Marxism from the philosophical and political

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<sup>43</sup> The television and radio programmes dealing with Portugal focused on the radical changes being made to education there in the wake of the overthrow of the dictatorship in 1974. However, because these changes were recent, this did not provide a basis for the sort of comparative analysis outlined here.

framework within which this was embedded.<sup>44</sup> Gould seems to accept that Marxism provides worthwhile theoretical resources for sociology but he clearly rejects Marxist politics, not least as inappropriate in an academic discipline like sociology, which in his view should be value-neutral, in other words non-partisan. He also clearly rejects the philosophical ideas embedded in much Marxist work, associating these (mistakenly) with relativism, and with the sociology of knowledge; the latter being seen as committing the genetic fallacy (see Curtis and Petras 1970; Moore and Young 2010).

It is unclear to what extent the editors of *Schooling and Capitalism* were committed to these political and philosophical components of Marxism. As we have seen, their main emphasis was on providing an immanent critique of the UK education system. The main place in the *Schooling and Capitalism* Reader where these other aspects of Marxism appear is in its first main chapter, written by Gintis.<sup>45</sup> He assesses the ideas of Ivan Illich, in the context of the broad movement for radical educational and social change that was still flourishing at the time, both in the US and the UK. He largely agrees with Illich's evaluation of the present state of Western society – as being characterized by a consumerist preoccupation with satisfying false needs, and as involving a lack of authentic personal autonomy. However, he disagrees with Illich's diagnosis of the cause of this condition and with the solution that Illich proposes, rejecting it as based on a consumption rather than a production perspective. According to Gintis, Illich fails to recognize that the symptoms he documents are not the product of manipulative organizations, such as schools, but rather of the fundamental structure of capitalism. It is *this* which generates alienated forms of consumption, as well as of labour, and it is *this* that must be changed if more authentic human forms of life are to be realized. Moreover, where Illich seems to assume a universal human nature, a 'natural essence' (Gintis 1976:13), that has been distorted by manipulative institutions, Gintis argues (with Marx) that human nature must be seen as subject to historical realisation, so that the task is to look at the potential built into present and likely future society for realizing human ideals. What seems to be alluded to here is the sort of teleological conception of history characteristic of the early writings of Marx, and promoted by some influential Marxists of the time, notably Marcuse.<sup>46</sup> Thus, Gintis locates his sociological analysis of the role of schooling in the United States both in relation to a conception of a true, albeit historically emerging, human nature from which there is currently alienation, and to the political role that such an analysis can serve for a revolutionary movement.

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<sup>44</sup> Bottomore and Rubel (1956) provided an influential model for this, see also Bottomore 1975. It is also to be found in Dahrendorf 1959. This tendency can be traced back to Weber who drew on Marxist sociological ideas while rejecting both Marx's philosophical stance and his politics.

<sup>45</sup> They are touched on in some other places, most notably in the final chapter by Freire. In his final review unit for the Course, Hall suggests that 'the "logic" of the Bowles and Gintis exposition makes little sense unless we understand the philosophical terrain on which their concepts are working' (p46). However, he does not in fact provide much guidance on this. Interestingly, an extract from Althusser's critique of humanist Marxism is included in one of the other readers: Cosin et al 1977.

<sup>46</sup> The significance of Marx's early work was that it offered a humanistic perspective very much at odds with the kind of Marxism institutionalized in the Soviet Union, and indeed also with that represented by most Western communist parties. In addition, there was interest at the time in the writings of Mao and in the example of Cuba, as well as the exploits of Guevara. An extract from Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* was included in *Schooling and Capitalism*.

Here, then, there is clear commitment to both the distinctively philosophical and political commitments of Marxism. As we saw, in his critique, Gould formulates the tension within Marxism in terms of whether it is a matter of faith or of science. While this is clearly too crude, it does point to the importance of the underlying teleological philosophy just mentioned. There has long been an argument that this kind of historicism is a secularized version of medieval Christian theology (Löwith 1949 and 1982). Of course, for some Marxists, notably some of those belonging to the Frankfurt School, it came to be concluded that History had taken a wrong turn and that there was no way back, while other Marxists subjected such historicism to cogent criticism, notably those influenced by neo-Kantianism. It was also rejected later by structuralist Marxists like Althusser and by post-structuralists and postmodernists such as Foucault and Lyotard.

Equally important, Gintis is also clearly committed to Marxist politics. Indeed, he endorses Dutschke's call for a 'long march through the institutions' and recommends the promotion of 'non-reformist reforms' designed to challenge existing power structures.<sup>47</sup> What is required is a 'political strategy' aimed at generating 'a serious mass movement toward constructive social change' (Gintis 1976:17). It is also striking that at one point he argues that attempts by ruling elites to mollify the contradictions of capitalism (in other words, to counter its effects in order better to realize liberal ideals) should be 'thwarted', and that 'the persistence of contradictions in society at large' should be used 'to expand the political base and power of a revolutionary movement' (Gintis 1976:17). What seems to be involved here is the idea that any partial movement towards realizing values under the existing regime should be resisted because it encourages reconciliation with that regime, thereby blocking the way to the radical transformation that is necessary if genuine freedom and equality are to be achieved. However, it is left unclear in the *Schooling and Capitalism* Reader, and in Block 1 of the Course, exactly what programme of political action is assumed to follow from a Marxist analysis.

My conclusion here, then, is that Gould was correct that there were issues about the character of Marxism that needed to be addressed, and did not get sufficient attention in the Reader, or for that matter in the Course. He was also right that there are questions to be asked about what are and are not legitimate approaches within social science, and about what ought to be included in a sociology of education course. Both the political and philosophical aspects of Marxism are sharply opposed to the academic ideal of detached inquiry that, at the time, still underpinned the operation of universities.<sup>48</sup> The assumptions it involves and how these might be

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<sup>47</sup> There is also reference to the 'long march' in Bowles and Gintis's book (p17), and there too they emphasise the need for a 'revolutionary transformation of social life'. The rationale for this is outlined by Arblaster from a more libertarian position (1973:181): 'In the last analysis an education free from authoritarianism and free from the distortions currently imposed on it by capitalism and the capitalist state, cannot exist within the context of capitalism and authoritarianism in society as a whole. That is why the fight for freedom and democracy in education must also be a struggle for revolutionary social change'. It is worth noting that the 'long march through the institutions' was put forward by Dutschke as an alternative strategy to mass action designed to gain immediate takeover, as had failed in the late 1960s, and to terrorist action, as exemplified at the time by the Baader-Meinhof group.

<sup>48</sup> Of course, since then, commitment to this academic ideal has not only come under increasing challenge by the widespread adoption of a 'critical' orientation on the part of many influential academic social scientists but also by growing pressures on universities to serve the economy and the wider society in direct ways: see Hammersley 2011.

assessed ought to have been examined. At the same time, in my view, Gould's critique is based on an exaggerated contrast between the openness of liberalism and the closed perspective of Marxism.<sup>49</sup>

### *Teaching Sociology*

While Gould's critique relates to just one of the readers produced for E202, rather than to the whole course, as we saw he nevertheless makes some pedagogical criticisms. And there clearly are important issues relating to how sociology (and other social sciences) ought to be taught. These concern, in part, what the purpose of such courses should be. Moreover, in the case of E202 this was further complicated by the fact that it was an education course that would be taken by a large number of teachers, albeit not as part of their training.

We can contrast several rather different conceptions of the purpose of sociology of education courses. They could be seen as contributing to a process of liberal education, in other words providing the knowledge and resources required for students to engage in intellectual and personal development, so as to come to understand the world and themselves better. Or, they might be viewed as inducting students into the discipline of sociology, or at least developing a well-informed audience for sociological work. Or, again, the aim could be conceived in vocational terms, as concerned with contributing to the professional development of teachers and others involved in the education system: providing them with the resources to improve their understanding and practice. All of these purposes are at odds with the political pedagogical project envisaged by Gintis in his chapter in *Schooling and Capitalism*, which corresponds broadly to the political project attributed to E202, and to some other OU courses, by Gould and other critics.

All that can be said about this issue here is that, as far as I can remember, there was little discussion amongst the Course Team about the goals of the Course (though I was not there when it was initially planned), and they are likely to have had very different views about it. Furthermore, it is not clear that even those parts of the Course that were directly criticized were designed to serve the political project outlined by Gintis. It is also worth noting that, as one critic (Harris 1978) pointed out, the pedagogical style adopted by E202 was of the most traditional, transmission-oriented kind, even allowing for the constraints of distance teaching: students were required to read and understand a very large amount of material, and then to write essays on this. This is, perhaps, not what would be expected if the aim had been to mobilize teachers and others to subvert Western society.<sup>50</sup>

There are also pedagogical issues raised by Gould that relate more to the means of facilitating sociological education rather than to its purposes. Here, in broad terms, we can contrast a didactic with a pluralistic approach (without intending either of these terms pejoratively). In the didactic approach, a particular picture of society is presented as based on the results of sociological investigation, with only minor if any

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<sup>49</sup> See, for example, Kendall's (1960) critique of Popper's notion of the open society.

<sup>50</sup> This is an open question, for example see Entwistle's (1979) interesting discussion of the pedagogical implications to be found in Gramsci's writings.

indication of doubts and disagreements at a substantive, theoretical or methodological level. Much teaching of scientific disciplines takes this general form (see Kuhn 1963), and in the social sciences it is characteristic, for example, of the way that economics is often taught and represented in textbooks.<sup>51</sup> By contrast, a pluralistic approach introduces a set of competing approaches, the different pictures they provide, and the arguments offered in support of and against them. In the 1970s this ‘multiple perspectives’ approach to teaching sociology became increasingly common.<sup>52</sup>

There has often been criticism of the didactic approach on the grounds that it misrepresents both the nature of inquiry *and* what is taken at the time to be well-grounded knowledge by researchers in the field: at the very least, what is taught in courses always tends to be somewhat out of date, as well as being simplified. However, the pluralistic approach has also been criticized, for example because it transfers to students the burden of responsibility for making judgments about the relative validity of the perspectives presented, or of finding ways to reconcile the different pictures of society that they generate. It may also appear to present the image of a discipline that is incapable of producing a body of sound knowledge.<sup>53</sup>

Besides pluralism, another aspect of the contrast with a didactic mode of teaching is the attempt to encourage a critical approach on the part of students: they are to be encouraged to question and debate the validity of different arguments and perspectives.<sup>54</sup> However, while, generally speaking, ‘critical thinking’ has been widely seen as desirable, it is not an all-or-nothing matter. A little thought should make clear that if taken too far it could result in a full-blown skepticism, thereby undercutting all knowledge and learning, and perhaps even all action. Encouraging this would amount to a performative contradiction in a university. This indicates that there needs to be some agreement, in broad terms, about what are and are not reasonable forms of criticism, about what can (for the moment) be treated as beyond reasonable doubt, and about some means of determining this.

Gould criticizes E202 for adopting a didactic approach in both of the above senses. However, whether the criticism is sound is a complex matter to determine, partly because of the complexities just outlined. If, first of all, we examine the single-perspective-versus-multiple-perspective dimension, what is at issue here is the question of ‘balance’. A key part of Gould’s objection to E202 was that Marxism was

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<sup>51</sup> Economics courses have recently come under increasing criticism for such ‘dogmatism’, for references see Hammersley 2014b. In this connection, it is worth noting a statement from the West German communist student group Spartakus, quoted by Jacka et al (1975:135): ‘We are carrying on the struggle for securing the position of Marxism in university studies, but not as a pluralistic supplement to the bourgeois scientific enterprise, since co-existence between bourgeois and Marxist science within the university is impossible’. Earlier in their book Jacka et al indicate that some of the sociology staff at the Polytechnic of North London were intent on teaching sociology entirely from a Marxist perspective (pp44 and 90) and this may have been true elsewhere.

<sup>52</sup> For an example, see Cuff et al 1979, currently in its fifth edition 2006. Blackledge and Hunt 1986 adopted the same approach in relation to the sociology of education.

<sup>53</sup> It is worth pointing out that differing conclusions can be reached about different disciplines as regards whether a more didactic or pluralistic approach is most appropriate for each one. See Becher’s (1989) argument that disciplines have very different cultures.

<sup>54</sup> Gould notes with irony that often ‘critical’ approaches in social science, in other words ones that offer a critique of society, are taught in a dogmatic fashion, in other words without encouraging students to engage critically with the ‘critical’ perspective offered by the teacher.

being given too much space and prominence. He complains of ‘an overdose of Marxism’ (Gould 1977c). He objects to the fact that much of one Reader and the whole of the first Block were based primarily on this perspective. As we have seen, a frequent response on the part of members of the Course Team and others to this criticism was to point out that other parts of the course and other readers and set books represented very different perspectives. Gould’s (1977c:7) reaction to this defence was to suggest that it is a ‘gambit’ which implies that ‘to criticize part of an enterprise is somehow impossible or unworthy...’. This response seems to me to be largely beside the point: balance is necessarily about *degree* of coverage.

However, the defence offered against this aspect of Gould’s critique was not conclusive: it raises the question of exactly what the balance among perspectives in the Course was *by comparison with what it ought to have been*. In making any judgment about what the actual balance is, we need, first of all, to ask what counts as ‘weight’ and in particular how it is to be measured. This seems to relate both to the *amount* of coverage in a course and to the *prominence* of the coverage.

Amount could presumably be measured in terms of the proportion of units and set books in which particular perspectives are central – though this is no simple matter of calculation; and how strongly they figure in assessment tasks is also likely to be important. To judge amount of coverage we would also need to have some reasonably clear criterion for what is, and is not, to count as Marxist. It should be obvious, then, that there could be differing reasonable conclusions about the degree of coverage given to Marxism as against other perspectives in E202; though what cannot be denied is that the coverage was substantial. At the same time, a considerable amount of space was also assigned to at least two of its rivals: symbolic interactionism (to which Block 2 was devoted, the Reader *The Process of Schooling*, plus one of the set books), and the Durkheim-inspired approach of Bernstein (parts of Block 3, and one of the set books).<sup>55</sup>

Even if we can gauge the coverage given to different perspectives in the course, we must still identify some standard indicating *what weight they ought to have been given*. What seems to be involved here is a notion of adequate representation – hence imbalance, or bias, amounts to mis-representation of a field. This raises a couple of questions. One concerns what the field is that needs to be represented. The most obvious answer is that a course in the sociology of education should adequately represent that sub-discipline at the time concerned. The aim, presumably, should be to give students an adequate sense of the main contours of the sub-discipline, and in particular the different approaches within it. This would not require comprehensive coverage of all approaches or equal treatment of them, but it would demand coverage of significant variation.

But the issue of Marxist bias also necessarily raises the question of *political* balance. It is not just that Marxism usually carries an explicit or implicit political message but that other sociological perspectives are often seen as having distinctive political orientations or implications – a point that was assumed, for example, by both Musgrove and Esland in what they said about E202. At the same time, there is no

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<sup>55</sup> However, for the most part, Bernstein’s work was interpreted in the Course in a way that judged it compatible with Marxism. There were also units that were not specifically aligned with any particular approach.

automatic congruence between balance among perspectives within the sociology of education and political balance – unless one adopts an extremely crude approach whereby Marxism is on the Left and everything else is on the Right.<sup>56</sup>

Judging balance as regards the sociology of education, we should note that Marxist perspectives had not been very central to the sub-discipline up to that point in its history, although they were starting to become more significant.<sup>57</sup> However, following on from the character of its predecessor, E202 was clearly intended to be a cutting-edge course: one that captured the latest developments, and indeed that would shape the future of the sub-discipline. Questions can reasonably be asked about whether this orientation was appropriate; but it was, and is, far from uncommon.

A second question about balance is: *within what entity* must an appropriate balance be struck? This was a matter of disagreement among participants in the debate. For Gould, the focus was on the Course, Block 1, or even on the Reader itself. By contrast, in his piece in *Sesame*, Esland suggests that an appropriate field in which balance is to be achieved would be the education courses that the OU offers as a whole.<sup>58</sup> Meanwhile, in commenting on the dispute, Harris (1978:68) extends the field even further to encompass ideas in society generally. He writes that ‘Marxist ideas and analyses are already effectively “balanced” by ideas in general circulation which are embedded in practices and organizations both outside the education system and, crucially, within the education system itself’. Thus, ‘most students will come [to university] with a firmly established set of pre-theoretical ideas about society, human nature and so on which will often be non-Marxist or actually anti-Marxist’.<sup>59</sup> However, we should note that the further the entity within which balance is to be achieved is extended, the more the idea that what must be represented is the sociology of education loses force: we move towards some notion of political balance, or at least balance in general intellectual terms.

A sensible resolution to this problem is perhaps that there should be a reasonable balance within a course on the sociology of education more or less reflecting the balance among sociological perspectives within the sub-discipline at the time, albeit varying somewhat according to what is judged appropriate by the teachers concerned. At the same time, there should also be an assessment of the wider balance within curriculum offerings, and of how what is being presented relates to the background perspectives of students. It ought to be emphasized that there is much to be gained in pedagogical terms from students being introduced to perspectives that have political assumptions and implications at odds with their own views. Furthermore, what is required here is not ‘equal representation’ for all perspectives in a society; even less, representation in proportion to their acknowledged adherents.

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<sup>56</sup> This is more or less the position that Esland (1977) adopts in his response to Gould in *Sesame*, as does Hall (1977b) in a letter to the TES complaining about Gould’s article. An alternative formulation, influential among sociologists at the time, was a contrast between sociological approaches concerned with ‘order’ and those focusing on ‘action’ or ‘control’, see for example Dawe 1970. This drew the line of political balance in a significantly different way.

<sup>57</sup> Much the same was true of a symbolic interactionist approach.

<sup>58</sup> This was also the position taken in one of the official documents generated by the controversy, reporting comments made by the OU’s Academic Board.

<sup>59</sup> Interestingly, Lord Gardner, chancellor of the Open University at the time, made a similar point in a speech at an Open University degree ceremony: *Sesame* July 5 1977:1,4.

The issue of prominence is at least as problematic as that of coverage, though it is less complex. In fact, at the beginning of E202, in 1977, there was a unit prior to Block 1, written by Don Swift, which, amongst other things, introduced different sociological perspectives.<sup>60</sup> But, even aside from this, we might ask: Is appearing first or last (or in the middle) of a course the most prominent and influential position? Gould objects to the fact that the block employing a Marxist perspective came first, his fear being that this would set the framework of students' thinking, this persisting throughout their work on the course, perhaps even when other perspectives were introduced. However, similar concerns might have been raised if the material using a Marxist perspective had occurred later in the course, especially as the 'last word' nearer the examination, so that all other perspectives would have been reinterpreted through it.<sup>61</sup> In fact, Gould also complained that the final unit of the course, a review of it, was to be written by Stuart Hall – cultural theorist and leading member of the New Left, later to become professor of sociology at the Open University – and he was right that this review unit was written almost entirely from a Marxist perspective (Hall 1977b).

Another issue that might need to be addressed is how balance is to be benchmarked. One way is through comparison with other courses. Here the question would be: was E202 any more unbalanced than other courses in the sociology of education at the time, or than education or social science courses more generally? Or did the criticism arise simply because of a *particular* perceived imbalance (towards Marxism) that was found objectionable? After all, there was an absence of Marxist perspectives in other OU education courses, as Esland pointed out, and no doubt in social science courses in other universities, not least in business schools. Does this mean that these other courses were biased and therefore unacceptable?<sup>62</sup>

While making a judgment is very difficult, in my view there were grounds for complaint about the balance in E202, both as regards coverage and prominence of a Marxist approach. This perspective was certainly given much more emphasis than could have been justified in terms of its position within the sociology of education at the time. Out of seven blocks of units, containing between 2 and 7 units each (Block 1 contained 5 units), at least two blocks' worth of material could reasonably be judged Marxist, in broad terms. There were two other Readers of around the same length as *Schooling and Capitalism*, and each contained at least one chapter adopting a Marxist perspective. Finally, there were 7 set books, four of which could perhaps be designated as Marxist in orientation. At the same time, there was sufficient diversity in sociological approaches covered in the Course to disabuse students of the idea that there is one single generally accepted, or even one single correct, form of sociological analysis of education or only one correct political perspective. Moreover, as already

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<sup>60</sup> This was pointed out by Dale et al (1977b) in a letter in the TES responding to Gould's critique. Swift's unit was dropped in subsequent years, but was replaced by introductory material that also outlined competing sociological perspectives.

<sup>61</sup> It is often argued, however, that many students do not read the later parts of OU courses unless these are specifically aimed at preparing them for the examination.

<sup>62</sup> This was a point made by Don Swift, then head of the Sociology of Education Discipline Group at the Open University, in an item on E202 and Marxist bias on *The World at One*, a BBC news and current affairs lunch-time radio programme.

noted, students would have come with their own prior knowledge and opinions, which in most cases would not have been Marxist.

As I indicated, the other aspect of Gould's charge of dogmatism was that in E202 ideas were being presented in a way that did not encourage critical engagement. Here, his response to defenders pointing to the presence of other perspectives in the Course – to the effect that it is legitimate to criticize a single part of it – carries much more force. Furthermore, in my view (now, and at the time) his evaluation is accurate, even though the basis on which he made it – the contents of the *Schooling and Capitalism* Reader – was not adequate for reaching a conclusion about the course as a whole. If one examines the first block of the course there is little encouragement of students to critically engage with the arguments being presented; and this was a criticism made at the time within the Course Team. Moreover, while there was a revision unit in the course that *was* specifically geared to encouraging a critical approach on the part of students towards Blocks 1 and 2, it seems to me now that most of the rest of the Course did not sufficiently facilitate critical engagement on the part of students, including my own units.<sup>63</sup> Once again, though, we might ask how E202 compared with other courses at the time; and, in fact, in relation to other OU courses it was not unusual in its pedagogic approach.

In light of Gould's critique, it is perhaps worth looking more closely at the revision unit that was produced by Donald Mackinnon to cover Blocks 1 and 2. This was introduced against opposition from the authors of Block 1. Indeed, they insisted that there should be a preface to it. Part of this reads:

It should be pointed out that the authors of the units in Block I have considerable reservations about the approach and stance which Mackinnon adopts. They see this review as, inevitably, partial (in both senses of the word) and not intended to present a definitive critique of the first two blocks. They feel that, like the work it reviews, it has its own particular social and political location. They view it as a demonstration from one particular standpoint, that of analytic philosophy, of that critical (though by no means necessarily sceptical) approach they would urge you to adopt to the whole course – including, of course, to this review itself.

The authors of Block II, on the other hand, feel that Mackinnon's review provides a good model for you in approaching the correspondence texts [...] (E202 Unit 13:40)

What could be said about this is that the attitude of the Block 1 authors to the idea of encouraging students to adopt a critical approach (or at least their attitude towards Mackinnon's unit) seems ambivalent. This comes out more clearly when one looks carefully at that unit, since this was far from being concerned with offering a competing perspective in substantive terms, partial or otherwise: it simply reviews the

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<sup>63</sup> Block 2 units and some other parts of the course involved more activities than Block 1, though these primarily focused on the readings.

main arguments and evidence offered in the two blocks and makes some tentative judgments about their validity, encouraging students to do the same.<sup>64</sup>

In the opening part of the unit, Mackinnon writes ‘the way I have chosen to treat these topics does not represent any neutral or “official” course-team judgement on what has gone before; rather the arguments and conclusions are my judgements. I do not mean by that, of course, that I have not tried to be fair and objective, but only that there is no agreement that I have succeeded, nor indeed that these are possible or worthy aims’ (E202 Unit 13:41). Later he suggests that students adopt ‘a deliberately sceptical, critical, and indeed ungenerous state of mind, not at present allowing the argument the benefit of too many doubts’. However, he immediately adds:

That sort of approach has its limitations, of course. A critical attitude is indeed an essential part of sociology (or any intellectual pursuit), but it is only part. Equally important are the creative imagination to devise sociological theories, and the vision to see patterns which help make sense of the social world. Furthermore, scepticism can easily be taken too far. We can rarely, if ever, be totally certain of our conclusions, and if we are never prepared to proceed on the basis of beliefs which are only provisional, then we shall never proceed at all. But for the moment, let us demand to be convinced.

Mackinnon’s conclusion to the part of his unit concerned with Block I is as follows: ‘What I have tried to do is make the central arguments – and thus their strengths and weaknesses – stand out from the mass of illustrative and argumentative detail in [*Schooling in Capitalist America*]. I fear we are simply not in a position to pass final judgment on the [Bowles and Gintis] thesis. We are certainly not in a position to reject it, or to refuse to take seriously any developments and implications of it’ (p54).

There was, however, an appendix to Mackinnon’s unit, in which Peter Coxhead re-analyzed some of the data presented in Bowles and Gintis’s book, and concluded that parts of it were unreliable. He suggested that the strong correlation that these authors found between social and economic background and adult occupational position, and the correspondingly weak correlation between IQ and occupational outcomes, could be a product of this unreliability. Nevertheless, once again what was involved here was not the presentation of an alternative substantive view, simply a highlighting of problems with the evidence, ones that needed to be taken into consideration by students.

Dale and Esland’s reference to analytic philosophy in the preface to this review unit may suggest that what they were objecting to was the mode of thinking

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<sup>64</sup> There is an interesting issue concerned with Mackinnon’s approach that was raised by Madeleine Arnot in commenting on a revision unit written by him for a later block of the course, one that was not included in the course. The issue concerns whether the academic assessment of arguments should be carried out in terms of some threshold of validity, in the way that Mackinnon did, or whether they should be assessed in more substantive terms according to whether they are more convincing than competitors. It seems to me that both forms of assessment are of value, but that the first is prior, given that the task of assessment is to determine what should and should not be accepted as part of the accepted body of knowledge in a discipline. Moreover, with the second type of assessment it is imperative that what are being compared are arguments aimed at explaining the same phenomenon, or more specifically that they address the same question frame.

employed in the unit (the *type* of critical approach); though, curiously, they then appear to go on, partially, to endorse it. They may have been questioning the very idea that Mackinnon, or anyone else, could be 'fair and objective', for example on the grounds that every style of thinking operates on the basis of particular domain assumptions and has social functions relating to these; and that there can be no escape from this. However, unless some means of assessing lines of argument based on different domain assumptions can be identified, what results is a form of relativism, in which there simply are different, incommensurable perspectives, each being true in its own terms. The Marxist solution to this problem relies on its teleological philosophy of history, mentioned earlier. (And, in fact, this 'solution' simply pushes the problem back, to the task of justifying that philosophy.) But Dale and Esland do not indicate any explicit commitment to this philosophy, and even at the time it had come to be questioned or abandoned by many Marxists. As noted earlier, an alternative interpretation of the criticism, not incompatible, is based on the idea that critical assessment must always be of one theory as against others, rather than raising questions about just one theoretical approach in abstract. There is something to be said for this, though Mackinnon also raises questions about Block 2 materials on this basis in the same revision unit. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that the most reasonable conclusion in a field may not be that one theory is superior to another but rather that there is no account that has sufficient evidential support for us to come to a sound conclusion. This is the position Mackinnon takes.

Of course, as I have indicated, much university teaching, like much teaching in schools, is towards the didactic end of the spectrum, in this respect and others, particularly in the natural sciences but also in other fields. So, those of us who wish to emphasise the importance of encouraging critical engagement on the part of students need to make a case for this, as regards its possibility and perhaps even its desirability. Furthermore, it seems likely that many other courses would be open to criticism as failing to encourage students to adopt a sufficiently critical attitude. While there may be something in Gould's suggestion that there is a connection between Marxism and dogmatism, he relies on too crude a contrast between ideology and social science here. Even at the time he was writing, both Polanyi (1958) and Kuhn (1962) had argued that the Popperian contrast between the 'openness' of science, and of a liberal society, as against the closed character of ideology and of totalitarian societies, is simplistic. Furthermore, as I noted earlier, there are difficult issues regarding the *form* that criticism should take; in other words, what counts as sound, productive criticism and what does not. Indeed, as Mackinnon himself pointed out in the unit, it is important to recognize the limits to legitimate criticism, not to assume that all forms of criticism are desirable.

A related argument in the debate concerned the reaction of students. It was often argued that Gould was underestimating the capabilities of OU students: that they would be willing and able to question what was offered to them in courses, especially given that they were mature students with considerable experience of the world (see Harris 1976). While this is certainly true, it is important to recognize the authority that universities exercise (and this may have been greater than now), in the sense that there can be a tendency for many students to accept what is presented in courses 'on authority' rather than to critically assess it. A second point that Gould raises here is the question of how the work of any dissenting student would be marked. This is, of course, a consideration that students themselves are likely to have

taken into account. Of course, even if Gould's fears were true, they could simply adopt 'the right' perspective instrumentally for the purposes of getting a good grade without *genuinely* adopting it (a point made by Crick 1977). However, such instrumentalism can sometimes lead to people eventually becoming committed to a perspective (this is a psychological mechanism identified by William James and others).

Still, the treatment of students and their reaction to the Course were matters about which Gould could have had no information – not least because teaching on the course had barely started.<sup>65</sup> And he failed to take account of the size of the Course Team and the variation in views among its members, and (more important still) of the fact that the actual teaching and most of the marking would be carried out by a large team of tutors who were not central members of the Open University. He is, nevertheless, pointing to a difficult issue here: a teacher's assessment of arguments put forward by students must relate at least to some extent to substantive assumptions that he or she holds to be true, as well as more formal considerations about how arguments ought to be developed and presented. In other words, while it is certainly not legitimate to judge students' work according to how well it matches one's own views, assessment cannot be made without taking *some* account of what are, and what are not, plausible lines of argument, this necessarily relying to some degree on those views.

We can see, then, that the issue of balance is a genuine one, but that there are some difficult issues to resolve before coming to a well-grounded conclusion about whether E202 displayed Marxist bias. Moreover, these issues are sufficiently difficult for general agreement to be unlikely. My tentative conclusion is that there was some substance to the criticism, but that the bias involved was probably no greater than in many other courses.

### *The limits of toleration*

An important component of Gould's argument, made explicit in his Report (1977b), is that even liberal societies cannot tolerate everything: that they must protect themselves against internal as well as external threats, and in particular against attempts to subvert them. As we saw, in the 1950s there were major fears in some quarters (no doubt with a degree of justification) that there was a Soviet conspiracy to use the openness of Western culture to undermine it. And this fear resurfaced in the late 1960s and 1970s, especially among some members of the older generation, because of the flourishing of far left political groups, not only within universities but also among certain professions, notably teachers and social workers, and within the Labour Party. As already mentioned, Jacka et al's (1975) account of events in the Polytechnic of North London provides a clear sense of the fear that was behind criticism of E202 and other courses.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Interestingly, in the issue of *Sesame* containing the debate between Gould and Esland, some letters from E202 students are quoted. No doubt as a result of editorial selection, there are examples supporting both of the opposing views.

<sup>66</sup> What is reported in this book is very similar to accounts 'from the other side' of student disturbances in the late 1960s, notably Hoch and Schoenbach 1969. For a very different account of the events at PNL, see Campbell nd.

While there was no single, organized conspiracy operating, it was certainly the case that there were influential Leftist groups, of varying tendencies, whose aim was the revolutionary transformation of society. In the course of their discussion of the conflict at the Polytechnic of North London in the early 1970s, Jacka et al cite the following quote from an influential text coming out of the radical student movement of the 1960s:

the emergent student revolutionaries aim to turn the tables on the system by using its universities and colleges as base areas from which to undermine key institutions of the social order. No advanced capitalist state can afford to maintain a permanent police occupation of all colleges and universities, nor can it act like a Latin-American military thug and simply close down the universities which after all are necessary, in the long run, to the productive process. So long as the universities and colleges provide some sort of space which cannot be permanently policed they can become 'red bases' of revolutionary agitation and preparation. (Cockburn in Blackburn and Cockburn 1969:17; quoted in Jacka et al 1975:21-2).

Here Cockburn, a left-wing journalist, seems to be supporting organized attempts to undermine universities and thereby other 'key institutions of the social order'. As Jacka et al report, such attitudes were characteristic of influential, albeit very small, factions among students and staff within the sociology department at PNL, and the same was probably true at other institutions as well. And the key figures were members of far left political groups; though this does not mean, of course, that they were devoted solely to serving the interests of those groups.

Rather than seeking to promote the goals of Leftist political organizations, the editors of *Schooling and Capitalism* seem to have been primarily concerned with providing knowledge about how the education system is constrained by capitalism, presumably on the assumption that this would bring about significant change by democratic means. Indeed, in their introduction to Block I of the course, they formulate their goal in even weaker terms, as to encourage students to 'ask new questions' (Dale and Esland 1977:5). They outline the purpose of sociology as: 'to search out the underlying structures and rules which limit and define human relationships and the choices available within them', appealing here to Wright Mills' (1959) conception of 'the sociological imagination'.<sup>67</sup> While this involves challenging conventional views, it is a considerable distance from a coordinated strategy of political subversion. Jacka et al (1975:137) draw a distinction between dissent and disruption; the former being legitimate, the latter not. In these terms, Block 1 of E202 and the *Schooling and Capitalism* Reader amounted to little more than dissent from the prevailing views put forward in previous versions of the sociology of education, and in university education courses more generally.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> In effect, they are *defining* sociology as concerned with identifying the constraints that current social arrangements impose, in other words as critique. In this connection it is worth noting Daniel Bell's (1980:ch7) coruscating critique of Mills' 'Letter to the New Left', which is more sophisticated than Gould's criticism of E202 but very much along the same lines. He also indicates the generational background that motivates his political stance.

<sup>68</sup> Of course, fomenting dissent can be seen as one means of preparing the way for revolutionary action. Part of the problem here is that, like the rest of us, most of the time, the principal actors

It is important to recognize that there was a fundamental difference in perception between the two sharply opposed sides of the debate about E202, and about Leftist radicalism more generally in the late 1960s and 1970s. From the point of view of the kind of liberal position adopted by Gould, and others associated with the Report he produced, as well as many advocates of the end of ideology thesis, freedom of expression and action is not a *natural* state, in the sense of being automatically achieved and sustained once barriers to its realisation have been removed. The context for it has to be constructed, maintained, and protected. Furthermore, it is not a *simple* state: judgments have to be made about what should and should not be allowed, since there will often be conflicts amongst ideals and interests, forcing restrictions to be placed upon particular types of action, even sometimes including public expressions of belief. By contrast, it appears that Leftist radicals at the time tended to assume that the main prerequisite for realizing the ideals of freedom, democracy and equality was removing barriers they saw as blocking this. Moreover, it was insisted that these ideals are not in permanent conflict with one another, that apparent contradictions amongst them would disappear once capitalism had been abolished. So, removing this barrier to progress was the radicals' preoccupation, rather than a concern with protecting and building on existing achievements.

From a liberal point of view, any judgment about limits on what could be tolerated as regards dissent depended on some assessment both of how fragile current socio-political arrangements were and of how serious a threat the rise of revolutionary Leftism represented. Even amongst those opposed to it, there was considerable disagreement about the extent of the threat and about what could and could not be tolerated. There were many liberals, especially on the Left, who believed that Gould, Cox and others were greatly exaggerating the danger, and that they were seeking to proscribe what ought to be allowed. Moreover, the motivation here was probably not just a commitment to upholding the right to dissent but also the belief that pressure from radical Leftism would have progressive results, that the radical Left could serve as a ginger group. By contrast, Jacka et al suggested that such a view was naïve, and that liberals adopting this stance were gullible victims of radical deception and were thereby complicit in the undermining of liberal society. Of course, what is involved here may be not just a difference in strategy, but rather may reflect a different view about what is most essential to a liberal society.

Implicated in this conflict was a key issue about the nature of the change proposed by radical Leftists, or attributed to them by their critics. This concerned how far this change represented or entailed an abandonment of what, from a liberal point of view, were desirable or essential features of current society; as opposed to further development of that society in its own terms in desirable directions. There was a lack of clarity here on both sides of the debate. On the Left, as already noted, the focus was almost entirely on what was needed successfully to bring about fundamental change; rather than on the details of the kind of society aimed at. Underpinning this, often, was either the sort of stance attributed to Illich by Gintis, in his chapter in

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involved probably did not have clearly worked out and consistent goals or well-defined means, but instead rather vaguer and more variable conceptions of their purposes and strategies, as well as gaps between what they espoused and what they actually did. This does not rule out identifying differences between them, of course, but it does mean that we can only map their positions in relatively broad and tentative terms.

*Schooling and Capitalism*, or Gintis's own Marxist position. As we saw, Illich was committed to a notion of natural humanity that he believed had been distorted by dominating and manipulative institutions. Where his predecessor, Rousseau, had believed (at least in some moods) that it was impossible to return to the natural state, Illich seemed to hold that by abolishing these institutions convivial conditions could be restored: natural humanity would be set free. No positive plan for the new society was therefore required. Taking a rather different line, Gintis's position relied implicitly upon a Marxist-Hegelian meta-narrative whereby true human nature lies at the end of the process of historical development, and can only be realized if capitalism is overcome. Once again, though, this perspective seems to avoid the need for, and perhaps also undercuts the very possibility of, even an outline specification of what form the new society would take.

At root, of course, the disagreement among liberals, and between them and the radicals, was about which values were to be given priority, and how these should be interpreted. All sides were expressly committed to freedom, equality, and democracy, but they differed in how they interpreted these words, and perhaps also in the weight they gave to each principle; and to others, such as a high material standard of living. As regards equality, the radical emphasis was on equality of outcome rather than equality of opportunity, and indeed often on equality of reward. Democracy tended to be interpreted as requiring a direct process of collective decision-making, rather than the sort of representative democracy established in the UK and other Western societies. Following on from this, freedom was sometimes interpreted in positive rather than negative terms, to use the distinction popularized by Isaiah Berlin (1969:ch3). In other words, it involved self-rule, through participation in collective decision-making, rather than simply being left alone to make one's own individual decisions about how to live one's life; though radicals sometimes also seemed to adopt an extreme version of this negative conception – in terms of which there should be no constraints on what could be done.<sup>69</sup>

Not only did many liberals at the time reject the interpretations of freedom, democracy and equality adopted by the radicals, and the relative weights given to these, they also objected to the philosophical assumptions on which these interpretations relied, whether deriving from Rousseau or from Marx. Indeed, some regarded these ideas as speculative commitments dependent on faith, rather than on rational assessment and evidence, and therefore as dangerous (Gould 1977c). In light of twentieth-century history – not least the development of Marxism in Eastern Europe, China, and Cuba – they believed that these ideas posed a serious threat to the civil, economic, and political freedom that liberals viewed as essential to a good life for human beings. In particular, they believed that the idea that there is a guarantee built into socio-historical development promising the realization of all human ideals had itself fueled totalitarianism (Popper 1949, 1957). Of course, some also objected directly to the attack on capitalism, since they believed that this is essential to maintaining a high standard of living for a substantial proportion of the population, furthering economic growth, and preserving civil and political liberties. This idea came to be a central plank of Thatcherism – and Gould, Cox, and some others

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<sup>69</sup> While these ideals were taken to characterize the kind of society aimed at, needless to say they were not always honoured in pursuit of this goal. Arguably, though, such discrepancies are typical of much if not all political activity. On the particular character of this problem in the context of Marxism, see Lukes 1989.

involved in producing his Report came to be closely associated with this political stance.<sup>70</sup>

Liberals' commitment to freedom (of a negative kind) as the most important value meant that they were faced with a problem when anyone sought to use civil and political liberty to bring about changes in society that they perceived as threatening its liberal character (however interpreted). Acute issues arose about what should and should not be tolerated. Gould (1970:15) refers to a passage in Parsons' (1951:296-7) *The Social System* in which he identifies a vulnerability in 'the liberal individualistic type of society' when 'such symbols as freedom and justice may receive interpretations incompatible with the functional needs of the institutionalized order', interpretations that lay claim to legitimacy within the 'approved cultural tradition', so that, Gould points out, it is 'not possible to stigmatize these interpretations out of hand as illegitimate'. Thus, Parsons (1951:297) writes that 'the utopian deviant [...] puts himself in a highly favorable light by saying or implying "You merely pay lip service to this ideal, I will show that I really intend to act upon it"'. On the basis of this, Gould concludes that 'a rational society will neither encourage nor give free play to those who seek to spread, via simple or sophisticated means, the seeds of fundamental social doubt or distrust'. He writes that:

there is no place for the McCarthyisms of the Right or of the Left which seek in their own ways to undermine the fragile bonds of trust and civility with which we encounter our fellow citizens and the public power. There is no place for a paranoid style – for the locating and relocating in conspiracy the responsibility for social ills or for the human condition itself. (Gould 1970:17)

The key question, as regards E202, and other similar cases, was what is and is not legitimate in the context of academic teaching, this being one aspect of the issue of academic freedom more generally.<sup>71</sup> There needs to be clarity here, as far as possible, about what the principle of academic freedom allows and requires. On a narrow, and in my view correct, interpretation, this term refers to the discretion that researchers and teachers in universities must have if they are to be able to do their work well (see Russell 1993; Menand 1998; Post 2006; Fish 2014).<sup>72</sup> This is

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<sup>70</sup> For Gould's support for Thatcherism, see Gould and Anderson 1987. Here it is implied that she failed to be even more radical in desirable respects because of resistance from vested interests.

<sup>71</sup> It is worth noting that this issue may take on a distinctive form in the context of the sort of collaborative work characteristic of Open University Course Teams, and the teaching of OU courses via local tutors. There are complex issues here about the freedom of individual academics. This highlights the multi-faceted character of academic freedom, relating to the degree of independence universities have from governmental and other external pressures, the autonomy of faculties, departments, course teams and research groups within universities, *and* that of individual academics. See Perry's (1976:92-6) declaration, writing as Vice Chancellor just before the controversy over E202, that 'conventional academic freedom (as far as teaching is concerned) would not, and could not, be available to members of staff at the Open University', since courses had to be made by teams and are publicly available rather than given privately. He writes 'total academic freedom on the part of all its staff could lead to use being made of the teaching programmes to indulge in polemic, enabling an individual member of staff to preach disaffection or even sedition to a very large audience' (p94). He adds: 'we have, over the first six years of our life as a teaching institution using the mass media, avoided any major confrontation outside the university in relation to the choice of materials that we teach and the way that we teach them' (pp95-6). He spoke too soon.

<sup>72</sup> Some writers, for example Arblaster (1973), seem to conflate academic freedom with free speech. This has the effect of obscuring the distinctive responsibilities that academics have (Fish 2014). Indeed,

analogous to the discretion that other professions claim and exercise, and its justification arises from the complex character of the work involved, and from the fact that knowing how best to do this work must necessarily rely upon the expertise that relevant professionals have acquired in training and in practical experience. What is distinctive about academic freedom is that it is designed to protect academics from attempts to prevent their working on topics, putting forward arguments, teaching about particular ideas, etc, that others regard as unacceptable – as false and/or as damaging, whether to particular interests or even to the common good.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that this freedom is the other side of a *responsibility* to pursue the academic task as effectively as possible. Furthermore, there are limits to academic freedom, as there are to the discretion allowed other occupations. While these limits cannot be specified precisely in abstract terms, what is critical is that academics base decisions about what to research or teach, and how, primarily on judgments about what best serves the research or teaching task.<sup>73</sup>

If this conception of academic freedom is accepted, to teach Marxism so as to undermine the University and thereby to destabilize the State would not be justified, indeed it would be a breach of academic freedom, just as much as would be any attempt to prevent social scientists doing research relying on a Marxist perspective or teaching about Marxism. At the same time, in teaching students, the principle of academic freedom requires that it is made clear that other researchers in the field take different views, along with their reasons; and students must be encouraged to make their own critical assessments of the various positions, and facilitated in doing this.

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it is not clear how far the principle of free speech applies to the role of teaching: at the very least it is heavily qualified there by the demands of academic responsibility. Free speech is a right, primarily, of citizens, and citizenship is a role that is distinct from others. Speaking as a member of an organization or occupation, one does not have free speech in an open-ended sense, it is necessary to act in ways that are appropriate to the role being played. Of course, there may be occasions when one must treat the role of citizen as overriding other roles and speak out. But this must be the exception not the rule, if the academic vocation, or any other vocation, is to be sustained. (And there are conditions where it cannot be sustained, one example of many would be Palestine today: Butler 2006.) In these terms, free speech does not justify academics, as part of their work, presenting their opinions on matters outside their areas of expertise, either in their research publications or in their teaching (Fish 2008). Moreover, they must indicate the status of the views they present, in terms of how far these represent a consensus within the relevant academic community or are a minority view. Equally, though, it is arguable that academic freedom may sometimes allow academics to consider views that are beyond the pale as far as free speech in public in some societies is concerned. On the example of the Holocaust, see Hammersley 2011:ch8. On current debates about free speech, see Hammersley 2015.

<sup>73</sup> Of course, in extremis, they may have to temper or curtail their activities because there could be seriously damaging consequences in pursuing them. The sort of example generally used when making this point is the scientific discovery of an undetectable poison that can be made easily from widely available and cheap materials. It is harder to think of comparable examples relating to social inquiry. Furthermore, recognition of the limits on academic freedom is open to exploitation by governments and others, from all sides of the political spectrum, who are apt to declare a state of emergency and suspend academic freedom, seeing this as warranted much more readily than academics ought to allow if the conditions needed for their work are to be protected. Interestingly, Crick 1977 points out that in Gould's Report the term 'clear and present danger' is employed, which is typically used to call for a state of emergency. Ironically, Marcuse (1969:123) dismisses the idea that such danger is necessary for drastic action, where 'total catastrophe could be triggered at any moment', while going on precisely to use this justification for withdrawing tolerance for 'movements from the Right'.

It is worth noting that, in the context of 1970s Britain, as in many other situations, the principle of academic freedom, while liberal, was also conservative in an important respect: it required academics to operate within the currently institutionalized conception of their task. Prior to the 1960s this had generally been seen as concerned solely with developing and disseminating knowledge, though in some fields – medicine, law, engineering, as well as education – there was tension between this and service of professions (see Nisbet 1971). But, since the end of that decade, there has been an increasing tendency in many quarters to seek to broaden or change this mission. The pressure for this came, initially, from the Left, from those who believed that universities must lead the fight against inequality or oppression. More recently it has come from the Right as well: for example from those demanding that universities serve the knowledge economy (for which read ‘commercial enterprise’) more effectively. Interesting questions arise as to how far such revisions of the mission of the university are viable; and, even if they are, whether they should be supported or complied with.

The version of the academic vocation institutionalized in the first half of the twentieth century assumed an implicit contract between academics and the state and various publics, according to which pursuit of academic work is allowed, and perhaps also funded, in return for academics restricting themselves in their work to academic goals, rather than adopting political ones (Weber 1974; Atkinson 2004:4). This contract has not always been honoured, of course, but it was routinely acknowledged by both sides much of the time. Needless to say, the arrangements made between universities and the state, and with other external organizations, have taken different forms in different countries and can vary across institutions within a country. Moreover, they are subject to change over time. For these, and other, reasons they may sometimes come to be judged inadequate. However, in terms of this contract, any challenge must be solely on the grounds that conditions are at odds with what is required for the survival, or the flourishing, of the academic vocation; not, for example, because the wider society is viewed as unjust, exploitative, etc. While such social concerns are legitimate grounds for action on the part of citizens, they are outside of the responsibility of academics, as academics. And this includes social scientists.

This limited conception of the role of the university academic stems from the very nature of occupational specialization, from the moral division of labour it involves (Hammersley and Traianou 2012:Conclusion). Of course, much Marxism rejects such specialisation, ‘the division between mental and manual labour’ (Sohn-Rethel 1978), as an aspect of the alienation endemic in capitalist societies and that must be overcome. In these terms, Marxism as philosophy and politics is incompatible with academic freedom. Indeed, extending Bowles and Gintis’s argument, Marxists could view academic freedom as part of the liberal ideology that disguises the actual functioning of universities: preparing students for the capitalist economy. Here it might be argued that what is required if university education is to serve progressive purposes, namely actually to realize the ideals enshrined in liberalism or the sort of autonomy and equality that ought to be valued, is that sociology courses promote critique of existing institutions, or that they should be part of a political strategy aimed at generating ‘a serious mass movement toward constructive social change’ (Gintis 1976:17).

In fact, however, radicals in the 1970s, and subsequently, did frequently appeal to the principle of academic freedom. For example, as we saw, Esland (1977) responded to Gould's intervention by claiming that it amounted to an attack on the academic freedom of OU academics, and especially those committed to a 'radical' or 'critical' approach. What seemed to underpin this was the idea of unrestrained freedom, not just for academics but for everyone. On this interpretation, academic freedom is treated as corresponding to freedom of speech; what is challenged is 'authoritarianism', perhaps even the exercise of any kind of power (Arblaster 1973).<sup>74</sup>

Here the argument would be that genuine freedom of speech or academic freedom could not be properly achieved, and academic work therefore flourish, until capitalism is abolished. There are two aspects to this argument: that the academic vocation is incompatible with capitalism; and that it would flourish under socialism or communism. Liberals, of course, denied both of these propositions. And I believe they were right to do so, though later developments have complicated the picture, to say the least. In the UK in the 1970s, there were relatively few obstacles to academic work coming from capitalism or from other institutional sources. However, since that time, in the UK and elsewhere, capitalism has been unleashed from the constraints under which it previously operated, and the consequences of this for the academic vocation have become increasingly severe. In its current form, there is almost certainly an incompatibility. At the same time, the evidence we have about socialist and communist regimes, of various hues, seems to confirm that they offered no better prospect for academic freedom, indeed probably one that was much worse than the situation in the UK in the 1970s and even than today.

Returning to the specific question of whether E202 was within the bounds of what should be tolerated or ought to have been withdrawn because it failed to meet the requirements of academic responsibility, Gould's position seems ambivalent. One formulation of his critique is that *Schooling and Capitalism*, and perhaps the E202 course more generally, was unacceptable: inaccurate information, motivated by faith in Marxism, was being presented to students as if it were well-established knowledge. In these terms, he was calling for at least certain parts of E202 to be proscribed. Yet, when challenged about this, he denied that this was his intent, implying that he was simply engaging in necessary academic criticism of the Course.

If we consider E202 as a whole, I suggest that there is little justification for arguing that it breached the limits of academic freedom. As noted in the previous section, while a Marxist account is presented, it is not the only perspective to which students are exposed, nor were they exhorted to engage in revolutionary activity. Similarly, while students were not perhaps encouraged to be as critical of the arguments presented in the Course as would have been desirable, this was neither unique nor a fundamental breach – simply undesirable in academic terms.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Arblaster's position seems to have been quite similar to that of Illich in many respects, in the sense that it is based on the idea that what are required are the freedom and resources to facilitate natural processes of learning. For him, academic freedom is above all a matter of the freedom of students to learn 'according to their own convictions and interests' (p9). For challenges to such a view, see Post 2014 and Fish 2014.

<sup>75</sup> It is worth noting that if E202 had been formally part of a teacher education programme the issue of academic freedom might have needed to be approached in a rather different manner. The goal of professional education is not simply to introduce students to a discipline and enable them to learn the

Equally, though, I do not believe that either Gould's critique, or the establishment of an OU internal inquiry as a result of it, amounted to an attack on academic freedom. This is because, as already indicated, such freedom is not without proper limits, and because it is a collective as well as an individual matter. There must be scope for questions to be raised about whether it has been breached, and for universities to make judgments about this in relation to the activities of their own members.

## Conclusion

In this paper I have examined a dispute that took place in the second half of the 1970s, seeking to locate it in its socio-historical and intellectual context, to understand the positions taken by the various sides, to outline the main issues involved, and to assess the various arguments put forward. I also suggested that the issues raised continue to be important for social science today.

I argued that the dispute over E202 represented a generational conflict, but also an ideological one between a type of liberalism characteristic of many Anglo-American intellectuals in the 1950s and early 60s and the forms of radical Leftism that were adopted by some members of the younger generation of intellectuals towards the end of that decade, and into the 1970s. The sociology of education was on the front line of this conflict because of the centrality of education to the debate, and because of a rapid increase in the number of sociologists of education as a result of an expansion of the universities in the 1960s and 70s, and changes to teacher education. The 'new sociology of education' reflected this generational shift in perspective, transforming the sub-discipline in important ways. The move within it towards reproduction theory informed major parts of E202 *Schooling and Society* and, to some degree, it was this that prompted the controversy.

I outlined the criticism made of E202, or more specifically of one of its Readers *Schooling and Capitalism* (Dale et al 1976), and the responses that were made to this. In doing so, I identified four issues at the heart of the debate: the factual accuracy of the account of the education system and how it functioned provided in the Introduction to that Reader and elsewhere in the Course; the status of Marxism as a sociological perspective; how the sociology of education should be taught; and what should and should not be tolerated, as regards academic freedom.

My conclusion was that the criticisms varied somewhat in their validity. Gould's complaints about the account of capitalism in the Introduction to the Reader,

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knowledge and skills built into this, it is to produce competent practitioners and this relies upon a particular conception of the nature of the task in which they are to engage, in this case schoolteaching. There is a potentially quite sharp tension here between the requirement to prepare students for this role as it is currently defined in schools, and in terms of the demands that must be met there, and, on the other hand, enabling them to become reflective practitioners who might challenge prevailing definitions of the role, or indeed actively preparing them to adopt a form of 'good practice' that is at odds with current approaches. It could be argued that all of these goals are legitimate. What would not be legitimate, I suggest, would be seeking to prepare them to be political activists whose main task is to undermine schools and the wider social system. (There may, of course, be differences in view about what is currently 'good practice' and about what would constitute 'undermining' schools or society.)

and the early part of the Course, were justified to a large extent, it seems to me. Even in the light of Marxist ideas at the time, what was presented was a relatively crude theoretical account, a point which is indicated in Hall's (1977b) final review unit in the Course. Moreover, Gould's criticisms highlighted the distinctive philosophical and political character of this mode of thought, an issue that should have been addressed in the Course but was not. In this light, what needed particular attention was Marxism's commitment, in principle at least, to the unity of theory and practice and to a teleological conception of history.

As regards the issue of bias and balance in teaching the sociology of education, I argued that this is a complex matter of judgment about which there was therefore unlikely to be agreement. So, it is disputable whether E202 was or was not biased – in terms of coverage, the prominence given to Marxism, or the failure sufficiently to encourage a critical attitude on the part of students. Much depends upon how these features are gauged and what standard of evaluation is used. For what it is worth, my judgment, at the time and now, is that there were certainly grounds for legitimate criticism on this score too.

However, I pointed out that Gould's critique seemed to waver between, on the one hand, academic criticism of what should nevertheless be tolerated and, on the other, political criticism of what is intolerable because it breaches the limits of academic freedom. I argued that this principle is different from that of free speech, that the term refers to the freedom required to exercise the judgment needed in carrying out academic work well. In my view, there were no grounds for treating anything that was presented in E202 as a breach of academic responsibility. At the same time, contrary to the claims of Esland and others, Gould's critique, and even his call for intervention by the University, did not constitute a restriction on academic freedom either.

I want to end by considering how far the issues raised by debates over E202 are still pertinent today.<sup>76</sup> As regards the study of schooling, and many other areas, we can note that the sort of 'critical' approach adopted by much of the Course is now very common. While explicit commitment to Marxism is relatively rare, to a large extent the emphasis on freedom, equality, and democracy, and the distinctive interpretations of these principles characteristic of 1970s radicals, are taken for granted by many academics working in the education field, and in some other areas too. As a result, sociological research often seems to involve immanent critique, notably of government policies, amounting to the presentation of evaluations as facts, for example through the use of words that have both factual and evaluative senses, such as 'inequality', 'autonomy', 'discrimination', 'rights', etc (see Foster et al 2000). There is a further problem too that, since the values involved are rarely specified clearly, there is considerable scope for evaluations that are spuriously immanent, in the sense that the value standards adopted are significantly different from those that are actually espoused by the institution or society being evaluated, for example

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<sup>76</sup> The writings of David Horowitz (2007), once New Left activist now Conservative Republican, about academic freedom in the United States more or less parallel the complaints that Gould made in the 1970s. Something similar could no doubt be written in the UK, and indeed was done to some degree in relation to the field of education research by Tooley and Darby in 1998. My point is not that all of what Gould, Horowitz, or Tooley and Darby claim is true, only that they do identify some genuine problems.

involving different interpretations of what ‘equity’, ‘freedom’, and ‘democracy’ mean.

There are other related, and equally important, continuities in commitment between the 1970s and much sociological and other research on education today. A central one is the treatment of power. As I noted, Gould rightly criticised the statement in the Introduction to *Schooling and Capitalism* that ‘under a capitalist mode of production there is an unequal distribution of power’ and that ‘it is therefore in the interest of those who hold power to ensure the perpetuation of capitalism’ (Dale et al 1976:1). His main point was that this interest is not distinctive to capitalism. However, a deeper criticism concerns the apparent assumption that power should be equally distributed, and the idea that those in power are simply concerned with exercising and preserving it (see Bell 2000:52). While references to capitalism are less common today, power still seems to be viewed negatively, despite the considerable influence of Foucault and his emphasis on its enabling character. More importantly, it must be recognized that power is *inherently* unequal within the specific context of its exercise, so that it cannot be distributed equally: the term ‘power’ refers to the capacity to make people do things that they do not wish to do, or would not otherwise do. If there were an equal capacity to resist this effort then no actual power would exist. Moreover, it is surely a fantasy to assume that social relations could operate without anyone being forced to do some things that they do not want to do. This and the ubiquity of power relations, also recognized by Foucault, indicates that being ‘opposed to power’ is meaningless: what we should oppose is *illegitimate* power. The key question is how to determine when power is and is not legitimate, but this is rarely given attention.<sup>77</sup>

Of course, the situation today is very different from how it was in the 1970s, and it is essential to take this into account in thinking about the implications of the dispute over E202. For one thing, the boundaries around the sociology of education have subsequently become weakened or blurred to such an extent that it is not unreasonable to ask whether it retains any distinctive identity (Hammersley 1996). This raises questions about whether there is a discipline operating here that can legitimately lay claim to the exercise of academic freedom.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, since the 1970s, there have been major changes in the wider political situation, and in the character of the UK school system and of universities. These have largely confirmed the radicals’ understanding of the rapacious character of capitalism. They identified its internal dynamic and recognized, in a way that many liberals did not, the threat that it posed to the academy, and to the education system more generally (as well as to other aspects of the welfare state). Many liberals seem to have assumed at the time that the liberal polity and mixed economy of the 1950s and early 60s represented a stable equilibrium that could be preserved. In fact, the subsequent development of international capitalism and the political ideologies that this generated, from Thatcherism to New Labour and Coalition Conservatism, were increasingly at odds with their ideals.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Foucault simply bypassed this problem by means of an arbitrary distinction between power and resistance, see Patton 1998.

<sup>78</sup> That the operation of disciplines is essential to academic freedom is made clear by Post 2012 and Fish 2014.

<sup>79</sup> An early sign of the threat was Donald Hague’s (1991) report on universities.

At the same time, it could also be argued that the kind of Leftism that was influential among the younger generation in the 1960s and 70s prepared the way for the assault of the New Right. It posed a challenge that could then be used by them as justification for their own radical proposals, and they turned out to be much more effective in influencing government policy than the radical Left had been. Furthermore, we must judge the vision of Leftist radicals as having been utopian, not just in terms of the practical circumstances of the 1970s and subsequent decades but more generally. The teleological philosophy on which it relied is rightly rejected by most of those on the Left today, even if they do not always recognize the full implications of abandoning it.

So, the controversy over E202 raised crucial questions about the nature of university teaching, about the content and function of the ideal of academic freedom, and about the meaning of 'bias' and 'balance'; ones that are as pressing today as they ever were.

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