

*Baldacchino (Godfrey): Worker Co-operatives with Particular Reference to Malta: An Educationists' Theory and Practice.* Institute of Social Studies, Occasional Paper No. 107, The Hague, 1990, 156p. ISBN 90-6490-033-7

From the point of view of readers of this journal, Baldacchino's most important contribution in this monograph is probably his insight into the *style* of worker education undertaken in continuing education courses. He characterizes this as typically 'mainstream', traditional and one-directional – in a word, didactic. He refers this to the Freirian critique of such 'education' where 'the teacher is the subject of the learning process and the students are mere objects'. He contrasts it with the Rousseau/Mill view which sees education as a means by which people 'can deal critically and creatively with reality, discovering how to participate actively in the transformation of their world'. In an ideal situation, Baldacchino would expect worker cooperatives to act as educative experience in this way. Much of the monograph, based on careful theorization and direct experience, is directed at understanding why, in the Maltese context, cooperatives have *not* acted in this way and have, with a few exceptions, failed even in narrower commercial terms.

His major point is that historical-cultural context is a powerful determinant in the success or failure of cooperativism in both its wider and narrower aspects. The history of Malta as a 'fortress economy' dependent on various colonial powers using it as a military base has led, in his view, to a dominant culture of clientelism. Over the centuries, foreigners have provided the

economic *raison d'être* and, even today, the island state is dependent on foreigners as tourists. This has encouraged a top-down set of social relations and encouraged submissiveness among the working class who turn to mutual support networks and minor patronage as a 'natural' means of achieving ends which are individual rather than collective. Thus, even the high degree of proletarianization engendered by the British naval dockyards has not eventuated in collectivism so much as in clientelism, with a high degree of dependence on charismatic political and trade union leadership.

The problem with Baldacchino's analysis is that it seems somewhat tied, on the one hand to Gramscian Neo-Marxism and on the other hand to the necessary limitations of a single-context study. The Neo-Marxism makes it seem as though he is more interested in worker-cooperatives as the means of a proletarian 'counter-hegemony' than as the liberating educative practice he at first proposes. In the circumstances of today's world this is an important weakness. Appeal to the working class (which usually implies, as he himself notes, the *male* working class) is surely quite inadequate where the industrial working class is necessarily implicated in the apocalyptic world-capitalist drive for 'growth'. In several places he seems quite contemptuous of subsistence economy, decrying the Maltese farmers' failure to embrace 'risk-taking' and chemical technology, in spite of the fact that 'average incomes are quite satisfactory'. One suspects here a cultural prejudice against 'peasant' farmers in favour of the joys of collectivist 'modernity'.

It is, perhaps, the – literal – insularity of the argument that is most damaging. Baldacchino sees quite clearly that worker cooperatives can succeed only as part of wider social movements. However, his exclusively Maltese focus leads him to think of 'social movements' purely in terms of a traditional political culture – a labour movement based on the dockyards, a nationalist movement based on the *petite bourgeoisie* and a community politics based on the Catholic church. There is in his argument an ambience about the educative political culture of which he sees worker cooperatives as ideally forming part. On the one hand he welcomes a Rousseauesque/Freirian liberating pedagogy: on the other he treats the existing power relations of Maltese society as inexorable and calls for 'top-down support' for cooperative ventures. Given the limitations of a research monograph, Baldacchino nevertheless raises extremely important issues in a lively and fluent style. Some confusion can be forgiven: in this period of world history we are *all* confused!

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