

Courage My Friends Podcast Series II – Episode 1
Education, Critical Pedagogy and the
Future of Learning in a Post-Pandemic World

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ANNOUNCER: You're listening to *Needs No Introduction*.

Needs No Introduction is a rabble podcast network show that serves up a series of speeches, interviews and lectures from the finest minds of our time

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COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER: COVID. Capitalism. Climate. Three storms have converged and we're all caught in the vortex.

STREET VOICE 1: It's been two years already. If we can't get it together to deal with this world-wide pandemic, how are we going to deal with the climate crisis?

STREET VOICE 2: The future just seems so uncertain. What do say to my kids?

STREET VOICE 3: This is outrageous! The rich are getting richer, the are getting poorer. Where is the compassion? Where is the solidarity?

[music]

COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER: What brought us to this point? Can we go back to normal? Do we even want to?

Welcome back to this special podcast series by rabble.ca and the Tommy Douglas Institute (at George Brown College) and with the support of the Douglas-Coldwell-Layton Foundation. In the words of the great Tommy Douglas...

VOICE 4: Courage my friends; 'tis not too late to build a better world.

COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER: This is the *Courage My Friends* podcast.

RESH (HOST): Welcome back to the *Courage My Friends* podcast. I'm Resh Budhu, the host of this series.

Does education have a moral and political purpose? What do we mean by "critical pedagogy"? And why is it so vital in these times?

Our guest, Henry Giroux, speaks with us about *Education, Critical Pedagogy and the Future of Learning in a Post-Pandemic World*.

RESH: In our return to the courage, my friends podcast, we are delighted to welcome internationally renowned writer, educator, cultural critic, and public intellectual, Henry Giroux. With over 65 books and many more articles and journal publications to his name, as well as being the recipient of numerous awards and

honours, he has become one of the most powerful voices on the necessity of public education and critical pedagogy, especially in these neoliberal times.

Henry currently holds the McMaster University Chair for Scholarship in the Public Interest in the English and Cultural Studies Department. And is the Paulo Freire Distinguished Scholar in Critical Pedagogy.

His most recent books include *The Terror of the Unforeseen, Race, Politics and Pandemic Pedagogy: Education in a Time of Crisis, Pedagogy of Resistance: Against Manufactured Ignorance*, and the forthcoming *Insurrections: Education in the Age of Counter-Revolutionary Politics*.

Welcome Henry.

HENRY GIROUX: Hi Resh. I'm delighted to be here. Thanks for inviting me.

RESH: Oh, we're so happy to have you here.

Henry, I think it's safe to say that education for you is about much more than just method and rote learning and technical instruction. So what does education mean to you? Why has this been the focus of your work and your passion?

HENRY: Well, I think there are a couple of things to remember. I think that first of all, the first casualty of any form of authoritarianism are the minds that would oppose it, and this is not simply a political issue, it's an educational issue. And I think we live at a time - particularly during the pandemic, but this goes back to assuming the 1980s - where education has become so instrumentalized, that it has become depoliticized. And in a sense, there's an enormous price to pay for that. And that is that education, it seems to me, is fundamental to creating the citizens that need to be informed, critically engaged and aware of how knowledge and power works. Not only in terms of what it means to be educated, but what it means in a sense to learn how to govern and not simply be governed. And so I, I think that the to talk about education today, is to really talk about the struggle over agency. The struggle over identity. The struggle over power. The struggle over the relationship between all of those. And I think that what we are witnessing - particularly in the United States, if not in Hungary, in Brazil, in other authoritarian countries - what we are witnessing is a Right that is fully aware of the power of education, not as a liberatory force, but basically as an oppressive force. And I think that critical pedagogy is absolutely crucial in fighting this stuff and making people aware of how education is vitally central to politics itself.

I mean, in an age marked by a withering civic culture. At a time when social justice is under enormous attack. When the right wing dominates a whole range of cultural apparatuses, education becomes vital. And it has to be defined through the claims that it makes on democracy.

But let's be clear here. You had mentioned how I'm a staunch defender of public education, which of course, you know I am, But education is not just about schooling. Education is about the cultural force of a culture that's become a massive teaching machine. And we see it in the digital media. We see it in the social media. We see it

in apparatuses owned by the Murdochs. We see it in, of course, Fox News. Education, in the most dominating aspects of the term, has become the most powerful weapon capitalism has to basically de-politicize and oppress people.

RESH: And so what I'm hearing is that education is a political and a moral act.

And, indeed throughout your scholarship and your teaching and your writing and your work with its founder Paolo, Freire, you have become one of the most recognized and prolific proponents of what you've been discussing critical pedagogy. But just so that we're all on the same page, could you go a bit more into what is the essence of critical pedagogy?

HENRY: I mean, critical pedagogy rejects the notion that education, teaching, is either simply a method or a methodology, or it can be simply instrumentalized. It operates off the assumption that it's a moral and political project whose purpose basically is to equip students and others with the knowledge, the skills and the values and the sense of social responsibility that enables them to be engaged and critical agents. It keeps us all aware of the questions that need to be asked that directly link education to basically what it means to create a citizenry that's informed, engaged, knowledgeable, and takes on a sense of social responsibility.

I mean, I think one of the things that we have to remember is that education by default is political. And what I mean by that is it's political in that it's always directed, it's always aimed at producing particular forms of knowledge. It's always aimed at producing particular forms of agency, particular identities, particular subjects, particular notions of the future.

There is no way that you can separate education from the question of values, from the questions of power or the questions of authority. And I think that anybody who makes that claim basically is making a claim for de-politicizing their own politics. And I think that politics is utterly authoritarian. I think that critical pedagogy raises questions about not only the acquisition of knowledge - how do we learn under what circumstances, what institutions legitimate it, what policies direct it - but also about the struggle over agency and visions of the future. It raises questions about the relationship between democracy and informed citizens. And it makes the claim that education is never neutral and raises questions about the relationship between knowledge and power. About what knowledge is of most worth? How do we connect it to matters of self-definition? How do we understand it in terms of its democratic goals? What does it mean in terms of how it creates the foundation for both expanding the notion of the political and at the same time, expanding and connecting to the notion of a radical socialist, in my mind, a radical socialist democracy?

Pedagogy should be the place where students realize themselves as citizens. And I want to make a distinction here for your audience. When I say that education is political, we have to make a distinction between education being political and education being politicizing. And I think that when we talk about education being political, what we're arguing is that education is always connected to questions of

values, the struggle over agency, the questions of power, to particular kinds of social relationships, to particular modes of organization, particular relations of power.

But when we say it's politicizing, what we mean then is that it's a form of pedagogy is being constructed that's imposed on students. That offers no room for questions. That is dehumanizing, de-politicizing. And is indoctrinating. And I think it doesn't have the capacity to raise questions about its own values and its own politics. So a politicizing education is nothing more than pure indoctrination. And that's what we see in Florida. And that's what we see in Texas. And that's what we see all across the United States. I mean, the notion you can't talk about social justice. You can't talk about LGBTQ people. You can't talk about sexual orientation. You can't talk about slavery. You whitewash history. That's a politicizing education. That's education in the service of domination. It's education that narrows the notion of agency. And it's education that basically undoes a broad, expansive and emancipatory notion of politics.

RESH: This idea then of education as an inherently political act. And what you talk about in terms of de-politicizing is essentially about really disempowering, people who do have political agency and therefore education can also be used to build that political agency to eventually build that society that will benefit all of us. Throughout your work, you've talked about this being founded on this ability to make connections. What C. Wright Mills talked about in terms of the *sociological imagination*. That a first step is people being able to make the connections between seemingly individual ills and wider systemic social forces.

HENRY: I can't tell you how important what you just said is. Because it seems to me one of the most de-politicizing functions or politicizing education is that it reduces all questions of social responsibility to questions of individual responsibility.

It radically individualizes the subject. And in doing so, it makes the claim that all the problems that we face are basically individual problems. And in doing that, it does two unbelievably right-wing authoritarian things.

First, it says that you can't translate private troubles into larger social considerations. So it eliminates systemic notions of oppression.

Secondly, it operates in a kind of ethical void. Because it seems to suggest that you can remove economic and political activity from social cost. The question of equity disappears.

But it does something else. It also eliminates questions of historical consciousness. It also seems to suggest that history no longer really matters, unless it's a history that basically celebrates a kind of exceptionalism that we see all authoritarian countries lay claim to in the name of ultra-nationalism. And so it seems to me that critical pedagogy is a terrific threat to all of these.

I mean, I'm a little concerned about the discourse coming from progressives about Critical Race Theory. I mean, they'll say, well, look at this Critical Race Theory is

under attack. Yes, that's true. But what's really under attack is critical pedagogy. What's really under attack is the ability of students to be able to think at all. What's really under attack is giving any power to teachers, teachers who have some control over the conditions of their labor. What's really under attack is the notion that institutions should serve the public good, particularly schools. Or that cultural apparatuses have a responsibility to do more than de-politicize, commodify, and basically engage in forms of racial cleansing and exclusion. So, yes, I think that when we talk about pedagogy and democracy in those terms, let's remember education is not only a political and economic project, it's also a tool. And as a tool, it can be used for domination or it can be used for emancipation. And right now, in many ways, it's not being used on the side of emancipation.

RESH: Now to be somewhat self-referential, one of the founding principles of the Tommy Douglas Institute and this podcast has been about the building and protecting of public spaces for critical discourse. Almost 10 years ago, Henry, you were the inaugural speaker at the launch of the Tommy Douglas Institute at George Brown College in Toronto. And the focus of your speech and of so much of your work - and obviously what you're talking about now - has been about the decades of mounting neoliberal, threats and attacks against public education and critical thinking as it occurs within the academy and also outside.

Could you speak more about the specific strategies of how this has been happening within higher education?

HENRY: First of all, let me give you just a broad, general definition of neo-liberalism for people who really aren't familiar with the term and say something about some of its ideological components before I actually translate how that impacts on schools. Is that okay?

I think what we have to understand is that since the 1980s. Since Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher married each other and had a child called Hillary Clinton, I think that what we see is a political and economic system whose aim is the consolidation of class power in the hands of a financial elite. And it operates off a number of assumptions.

It operates off the assumption that the market should basically dictate not just the economy, but all aspects of social life. So it becomes the ultimate referent for defining what matters and what doesn't, who counts and who doesn't count. It reduces citizens to consumers. Competition is the defining characteristic for instance of human relations. Economic activity, as I've said, is reduced from social costs. It privatizes social services, It erodes public goods. It suggests that people who are left behind are losers. It casts inequality as a kind of virtue. And everything is commodified. Everyone is trapped in their own feelings. It treats Capital as the subject of history, rather than treating people as the subject of history. And it advocates, a rabid kind of social Darwinism, a kind of winner- take-all notion - That there is only one person left on the island. A kind of cheap imitation of reality TV.

Now the question is, how does that translate into higher education? And I think it translates around three important categories.

First of all, it takes the governing structures of higher education, if not public education, and translate those structures from an inherently democratic political institution that serves the public good to basically an economic institution that serves the interest of business. It's a business model. And that model operates off questions of cost and efficiency. Creates an endless army of mindless managerial staff. It operates off a kind of rigid notion of empiricism and a cultural of positivism and it instrumentalizes education.

Now, the question is how does it instrumentalize education? Well, what it does first off is it operates off the assumption that the only subjects that really matter in higher education are those that translate into profits for the business world.

And I'll give you a classic example. For instance, in Florida DeSantis just passed a law saying he will lower tuition, for people who take STEM courses, because those courses translate immediately into the possibility of improving one's worker's status or adjusting to what it means to be a worker. And we'll raise tuition for those people in the Liberal Arts. The Liberal Arts now because they don't translate immediately into profits, into a business culture, of course get basically either eliminated or reduced.

Secondly, power is consolidated in the hands of this governing structure. We no longer have political leaders who generate ideas that basically celebrate the democratic possibilities of education. We now have CEOs who talk in the language of the market. And in doing so, that ideology filters down into taking power away from teachers. Taking power away from educators.

And that has meant an enormous loss of power in terms of governing structures and control over labor for teachers, both in public education, in higher education. In the US 70% of all teachers are now contract teachers. Temporary jobs. Temporary contracts. This is really slave labor. I mean, this is the working model that Walmart uses, not a model that we saw in education in the 1960s.

So faculty have been de-skilled and de-politicized and live in fear and often live in poverty.

Thirdly, think about how we talk about students. Students are now consumers. Students are now commodities to be sold to businesses. Students are no longer talked about as sort of representing a future that could strengthen and deepen and make more meaningful the notion of democracy. That language has gone. Walk into any student-centre, whether in Canada or in the United States, and they look like malls. They're selling credit cards, they're selling books, they're selling clothes.

All of this speaks to a notion of neo-liberalism that basically has taken education and made it simply an adjunct of capitalism.

I mean, what we're talking about here is, we know this term, this old term, it's a form of capitalist realism. This is just simply the commercial outpost. That's what education has become; it's a commercial outpost that basically is always in the service of corporations. And increasingly, in the service of a rabid ideological fascism that wants to eliminate all dissent. Wants to eliminate any notion, any subject matter that basically is critical. Wants to eliminate critical pedagogy in every possible way. And engages in racial cleansing.

I mean higher education in the United States merges around two issues: one it serves a ruling capitalist class that basically has corporatized education. And secondly, it's increasingly serving a right-wing authoritarian form of fascist politics that really resemble much of what we saw in Nazi Germany. Whether it's the firing of teachers who basically exercise dissent, or whether it functions as a social sorting machine to make sure people of color don't get in or other groups. And thirdly, it becomes an indoctrination machine. And not only does it become an indoctrination machine, it becomes an indoctrination machine without apology. So, I guess that would be the scenario I would create in relatively simplistic terms that speaks to the collapse of higher education as a civic and public good.

RESH: In Canada too, over 70% of faculty in higher education are precarious as well. Right? So we're seeing this happening everywhere including here. People are teetering on the edge in terms yes, of precarity. Our students, as well are mired in debt, facing uncertain futures. Many of them are balancing school and trying to earn a living. And how do I take care of my family and feed my kids as well? So I'd imagine that aside, from those who become part of the indoctrinated, there are those who they know exactly what's happening. But there's just so much fear out of challenging these systems, precisely because they are so insecure.

HENRY: I mean, I think there are two issues there. One is about the question of what I call the politics of survival. And I think at one level what capitalism does in its most rabid neoliberal forms is it imposes situations in which people basically... time has become a liability rather than a resource.

In many ways, when you have to choose between food and medicine, or you have to basically survive just to make sure you can meet the most basic needs, it becomes very difficult to become political. And it becomes very difficult to have the time to basically engage in political activity. Still people do it.

Now, the other side of this is that, neoliberalism has failed. It's failed us in terms of its own ways of legitimating itself. It can't legitimate itself anymore. It can't say, well, if everybody rises up, meritocracy is working, there's a lot of social mobility, poverty's being eliminated. All that's gone. So now what it does is it scapegoats. It says the real problems are Blacks, the real problems are Brown people, undocumented immigrants, and most importantly, the real problem is youth. Youth is stupid, narcissistic, they don't care about anything.

The other side of the third element of this, is that you have in the country today - in light of that legitimation crisis and in light of the unbearable, danger being posed to

the planet and everything else - you have a lot of movements of resistance. And we don't want to forget this. You have teachers striking in the United States, you have young people organizing around a whole range of issues, from questions of the attack on women's reproductive rights, which will grow of course now. You have people mobilizing around questions of police violence as we saw with the George Floyd [protests]. I mean, there really are an enormous number of freedom movements that are waking up, so to speak, in light of a danger that is no longer hidden, is very visible.

Now the central question for all of that is can they somehow move beyond their own fragmented concerns and join in a larger social movement that could really bring these countries to a halt. And that's going to happen through direct action. I don't believe that the electoral process is going to change anything. It's a stop-gap measure. It certainly shouldn't be disavowed. But it's a stop-gap measure.

Capitalism has to come to an end. We have to develop an anti-capitalist consciousness and we have to find ways to mobilize people so that the machinery of resistance can work to stop ...whether we're talking about general strikes, whether we're talking about direct action in the form of theater performances in the streets. We have to find a way to connect the mass pedagogical raising of consciousness to social movements and institutions that are now willing to fight for not only their survival, but to provide modes of experience and values to inform others to join in. And if that doesn't happen, we're not going to win. It's not going to happen. But we need a mass movement in this country of workers, of young people.

All the elements are there, they just have to find a thread that brings them together. And that thread should be a radical socialist democracy. I mean we have to get beyond confusing capitalism with democracy. Democracy is not capitalism. Look around, look at the inequality. Look at what drives politics. Look at what's happened to civic institutions. Look at what's happening to the planet. Look at what's happening when a President of the United States, who claims he's a liberal, refuses to eliminate student loan, and yet raises the military budget by \$35 billion. These are centers they don't care about about people. I mean, they're just soft on some of the hard-line issues. They're wedded to Goldman Sachs, just like the Right is. Although the Right is also wedded to racism and white supremacy. That's all. So this has got to change. I mean, it has to change to a massive movement in which matters of consciousness, matters of pedagogy and matters of education become central to politics, coupled with action that's direct and mobilized in massive waves.

RESH: And you talk about this in terms of what you call a "comprehensive politics". You've mentioned the climate crisis and that is far and away the largest crisis that has ever faced us. And this takes us beyond borders. Are you seeing us moving towards sort of an international, comprehensive politic in terms of dealing with this. Because what both climate and COVID has taught us is that our survival relies on our solidarity. Could you speak more to that?

HENRY: Yeah. Thank you very much. Resh, that's a really smart question.

I mean, I think that there are a couple of issues to deal with here. I think that first of all, if you look at the youth movements whether we're talking about the Black Lives Matter movement or others, their politics cross national boundaries. They're talking to Palestinian youth. They're talking to youth in Hungary. They talking to youth in Brazil. They're talking to youth about public health and more. And they're learning from each other.

So there is no question that these problems can not be considered simply local. Though that may be a place to start, to be able to broaden that consideration.

The second issue is a little more difficult for me. And that is we tend to isolate politics and not connect the dots. We tend to talk about schooling, the failure of public education, or the attack on public education, but we don't talk about neoliberalism. We don't talk about a larger economic system that's at war with all public goods.

You know, we talk about the climate crisis, but we don't talk about how that's connected to a war against women's reproductive rights, which is part of a larger war against democracy itself.

And I think until we can make these connections... You know these connections used to be made. You know, I'm old enough to know that there was a series of intellectuals from Herbert Marcuse to Stanley Aronowitz to people like Angela Davis. They think in terms of a totality. They think in terms of the system. They think in terms of how these things are connected. And we have to get away from this fragmented thinking, because in those silos we cannot raise the questions that really matter; except for the specific instances that we're focusing on. You can't be for climate change and be a racist and believe in democracy. You can't do it. And I think this radical, this wider, broader understanding of socialist democracy and radical democracy is able to provide the thread to speak to workers, to women, to young people in terms of suggesting that all these forms of repression have a common link. And that they have to be understood in those terms.

RESH: And in terms of, you know, when we're talking about climate and this need to really connect it to every corner of our lives, I think that's where the discourse of Climate Justice comes in. That it needs to be linked to this idea of a wider anti-oppressive struggle.

HENRY: But I'll say this. I don't disagree with that. I think you're right on target. But I'm going to tell you, I have a qualification for that position. And that is you cannot talk about climate change without talking about inequality. I'm sorry. You, you separate that from the question of inequality and you're lost. Then it becomes fashionable. Then it becomes an abstraction that doesn't really touch people's lives in a really direct sense, except those who were the subject of environmental racism and environmental degradation by virtue of inequality.

RESH: Right.

HENRY: The second issue is nuclear war. I mean, you know, capitalism and militarism inform each other. And I think that we'd have to understand that in light of the climate devastation. It's again, bringing these together. I'm with you on the notion that the environmental problem touches everybody, in every way. But at the same time, inequality and capitalism and militarism, are driving it.

That's the framework that drives it? Not the problem that's obvious by virtue of examining it

RESH: And that's one of the biggest, market externalities - Those, social and climate impacts that aren't reflected on the sticker price of the products that we buy. And of course this is the capitalist machine.

But here we are, two years now into this global pandemic that has amplified, neoliberalism - I think at one point you called it sort of neo-liberalism on steroids. We have seen heightened attacks on our public institutions, public thought, education, critical pedagogy, as you say. And in your book, *Race Politics and Pandemic Pedagogy: Education in a Time of Crisis*, you write:

"The pandemic pedagogy that has emerged in the midst of this plague makes ignorance - as both the absence of knowledge and the willful refusal to know - a fundamental principle of politics, and in doing so tends to function so as to "erase everything that matters."

And in speaking of this, you mentioned some very specific tools of how this is done. The erasure or the absence of historical memory, organized, forgetting de-politicization, the "disimagination machine". Recently you've been writing about the concept of ethicide. So, I wonder if you could speak a bit more on, some of these tools of this pandemic pedagogy?

HENRY: I mean, pandemic pedagogy basically is a pedagogy of crisis. It operates off the assumption that the problems that it creates is so overwhelming that we have to make certain sacrifices that basically eliminate both the institutions and the civil liberties that they protect. And I think we particularly see it around a whole range of issues that you've talked about.

I mean, ignorance is no longer innocent. Ignorance is now part of a policy that basically aims to de-politicize people by basically allowing to give up your sense of agency in the service of someone who says they don't need to be smart. They don't need to be in control of their own lives. That they will do it for you. And that the first thing we have to do is eliminate those people basically who are not White, Christian and look like us, to be able to solve the problem.

Secondly, it seems to me, you have a major attack on civic institutions. Critical ideas are meaningless if the institutions that legitimate them and support them don't exist. And I think that what we're seeing here as a form of de-politicization is not just simply manufactured ignorance - which in itself is terrifically horrible and horrendous because it basically eliminates the ability of people to have a voice. And it instead

creates a kind of voicelessness, which is comparable to a kind of powerlessness. But you have institutions that are disappearing. That basically offered the

spaces, as you said earlier, these valuable public spaces where people can come together and basically exercise with a sense of solidarity and learn from each other.

Thirdly, it seems to me increasingly we have more institutions, disimagination machines, which we learn how to be helpless. We learn how to give up our sense of agency. We learn a form of ignorance that basically takes away the language, the sense of hope, the sense of possibility that would protect us from becoming complicitous in looking away in the face of capitalism's end-game. And its end-game is fascist politics. That's its end-game.

Increasingly, when I talk about a politics of ethicide, I'm talking about the collapse of conscience. I'm talking about a society that can no longer remember what it's done that it has to overcome. I'm talking about a notion of memory that begins to disappear; except to be rewritten in the language of racial cleansing. I'm talking about a language that eliminates class as a category. I'm talking about a language that basically seems to suggest - not suggest - that implements policies that says that women have no rights over the control of their bodies. A language that says that citizenship is a place only for white Christian evangelicals. And that all the civil liberties we've seen, that we've been fighting for for the last 25 years, 50 years - whether we're talking about gay rights or we're talking about civil rights - are about to disappear. That's what I'm talking about.

RESH: And it's interesting how, in terms of this rise of what you and many others are identifying as this current trend of right-wing populism as fascism that is happening really in many corners of the world. That there is a pathologizing and misdirection of an understandable anger and frustration and fear that people are feeling, but being misdirected, into corners of fascism and fundamentalism and racism.

HENRY: You know, the, the statistics I've looked at seem to suggest that the people who follow Trump the most, were not workers who are in despair, it's workers who are somewhat uneducated. And that his greatest following actually comes from people who make between over \$50 and \$150,000 a year. And they're basically White people who live in suburbs. So I think we need to be careful about the anxiety and the precarity and how it turns people into fascists. Racism has a long history in the United States and I don't think we want to underestimate its legacy and its effects.

I think the thing that basically bothers me is what I call a politics of closure and disappearance. The notion of the knowledge available and the institutions that are available, to be able to raise questions that hold power accountable are disappearing. And that's an enormous threat it would seem to me, to any form of civic consciousness capable of fighting fascism.

Now I'm going to be a little more specific on that because I think that this is not just about the Right. There's also an element among Progressives who don't want to learn from history.

And who seemed to suggest that any reference to fascism in the past, any reference to authoritarianism somehow is misguided and is inappropriate. As if fascism has only one model. Never changes. And if it doesn't completely replicate everything that let's say Hitler or Mussolini it's no longer applicable. Well that's nonsense. Because I think that fascism is always there in different forms. And it tends to resurrect itself in different ways. And if we can't learn from history and try to understand what that means.... Let's be clear. You know, you go from burning books to burning bodies. The language of fascism begins with language. It begins with the language of dehumanization. Begins with the language of brutality. It begins with the language of exclusion. And then you know what happens, Resh? It becomes normalized. And once it becomes normalized, it accelerates. And I think that I, for one along with my friend, Noam Chomsky and others are enormously frustrated by this inability of Progressives to wake up!

What do they need to do? Be put in concentration camps before they realized that they live in a fascist state, that fascism is right on tip. That we're about to all fall into the abyss, whether it be in 2022 or 2024? What does it mean when you have a guy like Tucker Carlson. Who is the most popular spokesperson for the Right now in the United States. Who has an audience of millions, who basically claims that Hungary is the model of the future, a relatively fascist state.

Now we need to think about this. I mean, you know, we're not just dealing with who can we vote in and who can we vote out? We're talking about a system that has collapsed in terms of its democratic possibilities. It's collapsed. And it demands a new language, new forms of resistance and a new understanding of what it means not to learn how to be helpless. How to not give up our sense of agency.

RESH: So, thoughtlessness is pretty, endemic to fascism that can occur really anywhere, on either side of the political spectrum. And I, you know, Hannah Arendt had spoken to this saying that "the essence of fascism is thoughtlessness. '

Just to go back to what you were saying, that the neoliberal state essentially has failed. And a common refrain over these two years of COVID, is that it has been revelatory, right? It has revealed, revealed, revealed the failures of the state. But you actually take this further in saying that what it has actually revealed is that the neoliberal state is itself a failed state.

HENRY: Yes, that's right. It's actually a suicidal state. I mean, it's a state that basically is driven by what I call and others have called, Mbembe, necropolitics. It's death-driven. It doesn't care about human needs and it doesn't care about human life.

This pandemic with millions of people who had died. If we had not lived in a global capitalist society would never, never, never have gone this far. If we had invested in

public health. If we had taken a collective needs seriously. If we had realized that state sovereignty cannot be replaced by economic sovereignty, this pandemic would have been addressed. And we would not see anywhere near the massive suffering that we have seen globally.

Even now that the inequality that I think is so crucial to driving capitalism, still plays itself out in a kind of normalized way.

Oh, you know, let's save Canada, let's make sure we all have drugs. Let's save the United States. Let's make sure that we get the drugs and the treatments that we need; while at the same time, those countries that are utterly poor, colonized and whose resources are being stripped away every day, they just disappear. They're not part of the conversation. But yet this pandemic has made it clear, they won't disappear because there'll be new variants coming out of those communities. And so it seems to me, there is a legitimization crisis at work here that needs to be addressed. But it has to be linked to an anti-capitalist consciousness that makes clear how evil this system really is. And now that it's at its end point and it can no longer defend itself, it moves into fascism.

I have a term for this. I'm not sure Resh if you know this; but my term is neoliberal fascism. That's where we are. We're in this stage of neoliberal fascism.

RESH: And we've seen this as, again, all of this heightening during this pandemic. The inequality heightening. The billionaire space-race, all of that.

I just want to take it back in terms of technology. We've all been forced as a matter of necessity, online. So we're doing everything online. We're working, we're socializing. In terms of education, we're teaching and learning on platforms like Teams and Blackboard and Zoom - We are taping this interview on Zoom. What does this do to the public space of discourse and education?

HENRY: I think there's a long view and there's a short view.

I think the long view is that these apparatuses, this new social media, these technologies are basically controlled by very few people. And I think if you don't understand that, then you fall into the trap of suggesting this is a new form of democracy. And I think that's just utter nonsense. Complete nonsense, as now made clear by Elon Musk, right? And the way in which, of course, Trump used Twitter to mobilize millions of little fascists into believing his conspiracy theories.

The other side of this is that look. Since the 1980s that space called the "social" has been deteriorating. And in its place is the enormous growth of social atomization. People being isolated. People, being alone. It becomes more difficult to create collective and embodied forms of solidarity. And I think that for all the benefits that this technology has offered us in terms of Zoom yes and so forth and so on. The dark side of this is that it's most powerful register is the destruction of community. The destruction of embodiment. The destruction of people being able to get together. And being able to, not just friend somebody or not just click onto a website that

suggests something about saving animals and feeling that that's the end of their politics. But I think it's undermined in many ways, a real viable sense of community.

I don't in any way have ignore the fact that underrepresented groups can use it to voice particular opinions. People like myself, for instance, but now at least we have access to certain alternative social media. But they are alternative social media - I mean, they're not. You know, we're still subject to enormous forms of censorship.

I mean, I find even in my own university, I don't think anybody reads my work. And you have to ask yourself, how does this happen? What is this all about? So I think the technology has done something. If I could be more theoretical and open up a different question.

What this technology has done - What Hannah Arendt could never have imagined and certainly not Marx - is that the relationship between power, culture and everyday life and politics has been revolutionized by this technology. Because it is the great disimagination machine.

Don't fool yourself. For all the benefits that it offers us, it commodifies people. For all of the benefits that it offers us, it puts an enormous amount of power in terms of shaping collective consciousness, in the hands of very few people. Five media outlets own 95% of the media. And you can't eliminate this from the new technologies.

I think we have to be very political and very careful about how we understand this stuff.

And I'll say the last point of course, is that around education I think it's been a disaster. The language of education and its purpose has so shifted to technological, instrumental, managerial concerns, that the only memos I get from anybody anymore now seem to be about how to use Zoom.

Right? Like what do you do when you check participant? And education now almost completely collapsed into these concerns? Where are the visions? Where's the notion of literacy? How do we expand it beyond how do you use Twitter? Right? I mean, I think that we have to go back to Marcuse and to the Frankfurt School and begin to understand how this notion of instrumental rationality has taken on an enormously different sense of importance in terms of how it shapes everyday life in politics.

RESH: Absolutely. And it's interesting how this has sort of really come about in banal ways and so quickly, but is in fact reshaping us and, you know, and distancing, creating that distance. You've made a great, analogy within, some of your recent works about this. We had to physically distance because of the contagious nature of the virus, but what you've pointed out is the way that the physical distance has been exploited to also create the socio-political distance, a distance from history and a distance from each other in subverting the ability to collectively organize.

Going back to your *Race, Politics and Pandemic Pedagogy*. You paraphrase Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci. And I believe what you were referring to is when he said that, and I quote, "when the old world is dying and the new world is being born, now is the time of monsters." Now he wrote this as a political dissident from probably his prison cell in fascist Italy in World War II. In speaking about what you describe as the current fascism and its extremes of rapaciousness and cruelty and the treatment of critical thought and social responsibility and historical memory as almost heretical - Would you see these as the final, desperate monsters of a dying neoliberalism or are they instead signaling a neoliberalism that is actually getting stronger and bolder and perhaps even more cruel?

HENRY: I think it's both. I think it's, the gasp of a dying system; no question about that. But I think that simply because it has enormous amounts of power - as I've said, neoliberalism on steroids - it basically is willing to destroy the planet in order to keep that power. And it's willing to basically renounce any notion of civil liberties and democracy in a rather unabashed way in order to do so. Remember, you and I Resh... I'm much older than you ... but you and I now live in a time where all of a sudden the unthinkable has become thinkable. Both in terms of what is said and in terms of policies that are being produced. And I think that's a crisis of desperation.

And I think that we have to make a difference between crisis and catastrophe here. And I think crises tend to mobilize people. They see the difference between what's being said and the objective conditions that bear down on their lives. Catastrophe means we normalize those conditions and they don't see the contradiction. And I think the fate of the world is going to lie between those two moments. Whether or not we're aware of the crisis and act on it. Or whether we see it as a catastrophe that's a function of destiny and there's nothing that can be done about it.

RESH: Henry, you have said that we need to know what has been happening in order to understand what is happening. And we also must be able to think about what ought to be happening instead. So when you envision the ideal - again, to bring it home - the ideal classroom or educational space, what ought that to look like?

HENRY: Well, first of all, it ought to be a space that's controlled by teachers. Sorry. I mean, teachers should have control over the conditions of their labor. They should be the most celebrated people in the world because they do something that almost nobody else does. They take seriously the relationship between education and civic responsibility. And I think that we need to make that clear as they do in Switzerland and Finland and other places. Or did. And I think that's the first thing we need to talk about.

Secondly, we need to provide a vision for education in the classroom. We need to make it clear that it's not enough to simply give kids access. It demands that every kid get a quality education.

Thirdly, I don't think we can separate the question of what goes on in the classroom from the larger society. And I think that if those classrooms are gonna work in the interest of both expanding the capacities for kids to be everything that they want to

be and to learn as much as they can in the interest of being both socially responsible and creative and imaginative, then we've got to make sure that the resources are available to do that, to invest in education.

Fourthly. It seems to me that we need to understand that education is so vital and so crucial with respect to whether or not a democracy can succeed or not; that we've got to do everything we can to protect the institutions that constitute themselves as schools, as public schooling. We've got to protect public schooling. We can't privatize schools. I'm sorry. This Charter School business and this standardization, the privatization, it's all nonsense

Fifthly. It seems to me, we need to take the question of the imagination seriously. How do we not just talk about what kids need to learn? Why can't we talk about what they need to learn in order to be inspired? What does it mean to instill in them a sense of civic consciousness in which there's a notion of joy and in creating those conditions in which they can work with others and feel for others and have a compassion for others?

Lastly, we need to link education to global movements. This is a global movement. It's not just simply a local movement. We're not just talking about teachers in Ontario. We're talking about teachers all over the world who need to see in each other the possibility for a future that is very different from the one in which we have just today.

RESH: Thank you so much, Henry. for joining us today, it has again been a pleasure.

HENRY: Okay Resh. Thank you very much.

RESH: That was writer, educator and public intellectual, Henry Giroux.

I'm Resh Budhu, host of *The Courage My Friends* podcast. Thanks for listening.

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