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The Corporate University *An E-interview with Dave Hill, Alpesh Maisuria, Anthony Nocella, and Michael Parenti*

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Abstract

Since the neo-liberal turn, corporate investment in universities has accelerated as the withdrawal of government funding, among other factors, has further exposed universities to market forces. While this process offers numerous benefits for corporations and wealthy individuals, it has been mostly detrimental for students, educators, and the public at large. In this interview, international scholars Dave Hill, Alpesh Maisuria, Anthony Nocella, and Michael Parenti broadly explain why corporations have been aggressively investing in universities. They address the numerous ways that corporate involvement in university activity negatively impacts academic freedom, research outcomes, and the practice of democracy. The interview ends on a hopeful note by presenting examples of resistance against corporate influence. Their analyses focus primarily on the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada.



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What follows below is the full transcript of a conversation I conducted with Dave Hill, Alpesh Maisuria, Anthony Nocella, and Michael Parenti. My motivation to conduct these interviews was based on my involvement in a hotly (and acrimoniously) contested debate among graduate students at the University of Toronto. This debate revolved around the question of whether the university should allow further commercialization of academic research conducted within the institution. These academics have published prolifically on this subject, and collectively represent a critical perspective on the commercialization, marketization, and corporatization of higher learning. In many ways, they stand at loggerheads with some of the student attitudes I encountered at the university.

The last forty years have witnessed a concerted and sustained neoliberal attack on public goods and services with government officials and wealthy elites at the vanguard. Institutions of higher education, once thought to be relatively immune to this encroachment, are now under siege both economically and ideologically. Governments have been steadily slashing funding for universities, while remaining money is being used to pay for the ballooning costs of university trustees, presidents, management, and athletic coaches whose salaries now more closely resemble those found in the corporate sector. Meanwhile, tenured faculty positions are disappearing and being replaced by low-paid, part-time adjuncts with little job security. As a strategy to make up for lost revenue, universities have been raising student tuition fees exponentially and have become increasingly reliant upon corporate funding and partnerships. The combined effect is that the university now operates more like a business; anything that does not maximize profits is cut or downsized. This has resulted in the shrinking or elimination of entire departments, particularly those in the humanities and social sciences, robbing students of the right to a well-rounded education which could provide a basis for critical thinking skills and the ability to participate meaningfully in crafting a more democratic society. Corporate involvement in, and funding of university research has oftentimes corrupted the process so that research questions and outcomes are rigged towards results that benefit the bottom line of corporate backers even if this means the results have to be manipulated. Faculty members who ask questions or produce research that are counter to corporate interests may find themselves marginalized or pushed out of their jobs. This is dangerous and undermines democratic processes because the public relies on research conducted at universities to make informed decisions on a wide range of issues impacting their lives.¹

I regularly attended Graduate Students' Union Committee meetings where students would present their perspectives on the issue of commercialization of academic research. Some students demonstrated naiveté by failing to recognize the link between corporate involvement in the university with the profitmaking imperatives of these same corporations. I was disheartened, however, when it became obvious that some students were cognizant of the conflict of interest that accepting money from corporations for research purposes entailed. Despite this awareness, these students had no qualms with further commercialization of university research because it meant their research and their departments would receive more money. Since this issue would be put to a vote at the Graduate Students' Union, and because I felt it important to spread a critical

¹ For more information regarding topics covered in this section see: Giroux, H. A. (2014). *Neoliberalism's war on higher education*. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books; Seybold, P. (2014, June 23). Servants of power: Higher education in an era of corporate control. Retrieved from: <http://www.truth-out.org>; Washburn, J. (2011, January-February). Academic freedom and the corporate university. *Academe*, 97(1), 8-13. Retrieved from: <http://www.aaup.org>

perspective, I conducted these interviews so that students would be better informed about what was at stake. My original intent was to create a short radio program using segments of this longer interview. The piece was aired on the university radio station as well as featured on the university website.² By providing students with a condensed and accessible form of information on this matter, I hoped that I might successfully sway the fence-sitters. In the end, further commercialization of university research was successfully defeated by a vote put to student government. While the result of this vote did not have a direct effect on the university's official policy, it nevertheless demonstrated solidarity among graduate students by presenting a unified official position of the Graduate Students' Union towards such an important matter. I hope that my contribution assisted in this struggle.

Footnotes and references have been added so that readers may access further information on the topics discussed.

The Interview

Marmol: I am honored to be interviewing the four of you today. I have read much of your work and recognize you as leading voices in your respective fields. To be honest, I am surprised at how accommodating you have all been in granting me this interview. I will start by asking why corporations invest in or fund universities? How does this corporate involvement affect students, faculty, and the public at large? What are the implications?

Maisuria: Sure, I mean, this is a very big and open question, but it is certainly something, which I think needs to be contextualized in a much broader discourse of neoliberalization, and it is within this discourse that you can start to understand what is going on in universities and how they are in cahoots with corporations through processes such as privatization, marketization, commercialization, financialization – all these kinds of things. So, it is firstly important to contextualize it and see what is going on in terms of corporations funding universities within the broader picture of the process of neoliberalization. That is very important to understand at the outset.

Hill: Well, Alpesh, [laughing] they are capitalist organizations. Capitalism is a savage, cutthroat, competitive business. Commercial companies, corporations, are seeking to take advantage over the other companies. This is classic Marxism, where profit is the life-blood of capitalism, and so corporations, big-business, tries to get whatever research they can in order to benefit their own organization or corporation. So, what they want from university research is, and from universities training for their industry, is competitive advantage. What they want is actually cash benefit. With capitalism there is no concern with humanity. There is no concern with solidarity. There is no concern with the collective good. There is no concern with the public will. There is no concern with the environment or with

² For the abridged audio podcast of this interview, which was broadcast on CIUT 89.5 FM Toronto, please see: Marmol, E. (Producer). (2013, April 1). *The corporate university* [Audio Podcast]. Retrieved from <http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/cmce/>

sustainability. What there is concern with, with capitalism, is simply - the bottom line - regardless of who it hurts, whoever it damages, and in some cases whoever it kills, and, in connection with your question, regardless of whoever's education it damages.

To move beyond the question of “what do specific corporations want from universities?” to the question of “what does Capital in general want from universities, indeed, from schooling and education and training in general?”

The impact of corporate control of education, of the control by Capital (by companies, their CEOs and other executives, their lobbyists, the politicians they control or influence) is that they want hierarchically produced, tiered/stratified labour power that is socially and politically quiescent.

Neoliberalism (which is simply the current phase of capitalism, one typified by intensified class war from above) wants to produce and reproduce this labour power - workers - at less and less cost to capital, by cuts in public spending, and where possible, transferring the costs of education (such as university education) from the state to the “consumer,” the student.³ In terms of producing and reproducing an ideologically and socially quiescent workforce, you have heard of the phrase that Margaret Thatcher invented, TINA, “there is no alternative.” Well, the current neoliberal and neoconservative philosophy is that there is no alternative to the current austerity-immiseration capitalism that we are seeing. There is no alternative, they say, to competitive individualism, consumerism, and commercialization. And because the capitalist class controls the media, or almost all the media, the television, the newspapers, because it controls much of what goes on in universities and schools, then what Louis Althusser called *the ideological state apparatuses* are at work on behalf of that neoliberal, that cruel, that brutal ideology which is in essence anti-humanist and anti-education.⁴ That phrase “there is no alternative,” what that seeks to do, and what the capitalist press and the media, and increasingly through corporate control of the curriculum of schools and universities, what it tries to do is to marginalize, demonize, exclude alternative ways of looking at the world. It tries to marginalize, for example, liberal views of the world. It tries to marginalize humanitarian views of the world. It tries to marginalize, in particular, what they fear, because we will seek to replace them and replace capitalism with a different form of society, a democratic Marxist or democratic socialist society.

³ See Harvey, D. (2007). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press; Hill, D. (2012). Immiseration capitalism, activism and education: Resistance, revolt and revenge. *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, 10(2), 1-53. Retrieved from <http://www.jceps.com>; Hill, D. (ed.) (2013). *Immiseration capitalism and education: Austerity, resistance and revolt*. Brighton, England: Institute for Education Policy Studies.

⁴ See Althusser, L., & Brewster, B. (1971). Ideology and ideological state apparatuses. In L. Althusser, *Lenin and philosophy, and other essays*. (pp. 127-186). New York, NY: Monthly Review Press. Retrieved from <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1970/ideology.htm>

Marmol: Thanks Dave and Alpeh for providing that crucial background information. It is important to contextualize the question within the broader framework of neoliberal capitalism and the imperatives of corporations that function within this system. Let us now move onto specifics.

Maisuria: More specifically, why do corporations fund universities? Well, at the moment in English universities there is a significant financial deficit, so basically something like 75 percent of the teaching grant in English universities has been, or will be cut back by the government. So, that means that there is a huge black hole. Basically three quarters of funding to universities has been taken away, which will not be offset by the tuition fees rise. It means that there is space for market forces to emerge. There is a big hole, which is exploitable and can potentially reap huge returns.

What we are seeing is various companies opening their eyes and thinking, “Wow, this is potentially an opportunity to exploit, make money, get profits from education.” So, just to give you two examples of this, Rupert Murdoch, who is a well-known Australian media mogul recently announced that he is going to be expanding his media empire into the educational technology market in England. What we know is that he wants something like 20 percent of his media empire to be involved with providing education at some kind of level. He has already invested something like \$360 million in an educational company in the United States of America to deliver educational provision.⁵ The second example that I can point to which is particularly pertinent is The Campaign Against the Arms Trade has found that there is substantial amounts of funding that comes from arms traders and arms dealers. Between 2008-2011 the Russell Group of universities in the UK received at least £83 million from these kinds of corporations.⁶ Now the obvious question here is why? Why on earth would Murdoch and people who deal in tanks and missiles want to involve themselves in higher education? Well, it is potentially a financial goldmine. UK universities generate something like £73 billion.⁷ Now, what people like Murdoch are looking at, and what makes his attraction so logical is that this £73 billion, he is thinking, he wants a slice of that. So he is seeing education as a new market that he wants to monopolize. One way is simply by sponsorship. It is free advertising for people like Murdoch. What Murdoch can do is provide sponsorship and showcase his products to generations of students who are immersed in his brand. It is potentially a huge market that he is tapping into. A medium sized UK university has around 40,000 students. To Rupert Murdoch that is 40,000 consumers. Building this kind of consciousness of Murdoch’s brands is really important for him. So, this idea of new markets is very important in terms of the question “why do corporations fund universities?”

⁵ See Strauss, V. (2010, November 23). Murdoch buys education technology company. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from <http://voices.washingtonpost.com/answer-sheet/murdoch-buys-education-technol.html>

⁶ See Top UK universities accept millions in arms company funding. (2012, August 23). Retrieved from <http://www.caat.org.uk/media/press-releases/2012-08-23.php>

⁷ See Universities’ contribution to economy increases by 24%. (2014, April 3). Retrieved from <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/highereducation/Pages/EconomicImpactRelease2014.aspx - .U46-ml7LDCK>

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Secondly, it has become more common for individuals and groups of individuals to donate money to universities in the UK. One of the key reasons that they would want to do this is because they would receive tax relief. The amount of tax that they would have to pay is basically capped. So, that means that they are essentially, just by giving money away, safeguarding their own financial interests. So this is obviously a huge pull factor for corporations and individuals to give money to universities. There was a survey by Ross-Case that found higher education institutions in the UK received a cash income of something like £560 million from donations.⁸ This was a couple of years ago and it is going to be even more now. The total makeup of philanthropy is something like two percent of the sector's total income. So, it is important for both corporations and individuals themselves to be engaging in philanthropy, but it is also important for the universities to have this income in an age of austerity

Also, we are beginning to see corporations that are funding universities starting to have more of a say and more of an input into the educational offerings in universities. For example, McDonalds and Harrods both have courses being offered in English Universities. If you can have that kind of educational capacity, well, you can potentially craft an entire workforce skilled with what you need for your business. Well, this is hugely beneficial for corporations because it means that corporations will not have to spend as much money on training, and will not have to invest as much money into skills acquisitions because they have the university doing such things for them. Moreover, they can potentially curb any criticism of their own business, but I'll let Anthony come in.

Nocella: Adding to what Alpesh has said, we also need to understand that the government is a great source of funding towards the goal of crafting a workforce. The Department of Homeland Security, DOD, National Security Agency, CIA, FBI, local, federal, and state law enforcement are all funding research projects at universities.⁹ So now we have the Department of Homeland Security funding Syracuse University for a national security studies certificate. The National Security Agency alone is funding almost 200 institutions.¹⁰ They fund graduate students at these institutions to do research, and guess what? Many of those graduate students go on to work at the NSA. So higher education has become a breeding ground for possible future employees, and they are training them to think in a particular way before they hire them so they do not have to waste time.

⁸ See Wallace, A., & Russell, P. (2012, March 27). University giving trends continue to rise; Sector raises more than £560million. Retrieved from <http://www.case.org>

⁹ See Giroux, H. A. (2007). *The university in chains: Confronting the military-industrial-academic complex*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.

¹⁰ See Tax payer funded NSA surveillance? (2014, February 11). Retrieved from http://blog.tenthamentcenter.com/2014/02/tax-payer-funded-nsa-surveillance/-_U264417LDCm; United States National Security Agency. *Centers of academic excellence institutions*. (2013, August 21). Retrieved from http://www.nsa.gov/ia/academic_outreach/nat_cae/institutions.shtml

Marmol: Anthony, in addition to what you are saying about the government and universities working to create a more compliant and ready-made workforce at taxpayer expense, a workforce you describe as being fashioned to work for security agencies, law enforcement, and war industries, why do you think corporations in particular are motivated to invest in universities?

Nocella: I think the reason why universities and colleges are such an attractive location to invest in by domestic as well as transnational corporations is because universities and colleges are the source, the central foundational source, of information influencing and affecting what people are thinking and doing in the future. I think if we want to teach future generations in a specific way, in a dogmatic way or in a particular philosophy, the best way of going about that is to have power within higher education, and that is what corporations are really catching onto. If they want to make efficient and effective employees that are not critical, that will not challenge their bosses, that will not challenge the executives, and the ideas of corporations and what they do to society in general, then what they need to do is eliminate critical thinking in education.

Beyond eliminating critical thinking in education, corporations are interested in universities for three basic general reasons. They want to develop a consumer that is interested in, let us say, Apple Computers, right? So they are going to push Apple Computers at every university graduate, faculty, staff, and student. So, that is one thing, consumers. They also want to produce employees, the best employees that they can possibly construct. Then they also want to eliminate any form of resistance to that particular corporation. So let us say, for example, Apple is aiding in the exploitation of child labour in other parts of the world, they want to eliminate resistance to those sorts of business practices. Corporations are interested in universities for those three reasons: consumers, as a source of future employees, and then also number three would be to eliminate any form of resistance to corporations. Corporations do not want any resistance, so that is why they are interested in universities because a huge segment of resistance throughout the world comes from college students. The Occupy movement is a classic example of that. The majority of the people involved in the Occupy movement globally have been students.¹¹

Marmol: Can you speak to how they silence that resistance? What are the methods used?

Nocella: Well, they do it subversively, and they do it directly. Directly, corporations repress students, faculty, and activists by eliminating financial support.¹² Corporations have come to monopolize financial support for higher education institutions. Thus, if they become the primary source of university financial support, they get to determine who is teaching on what subject, what kinds of

¹¹ See Nocella, A. J., & Gabbard, D. (Eds.). (2013). *Policing the campus: Academic repression, surveillance, and the Occupy movement*. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing.

¹² See Nocella, A. J., Best, S., & McLaren, P. (Eds.). (2010). *Academic repression: Reflections from the academic-industrial complex*. Edinburgh, Scotland: AK Press.

student groups are being funded, and what student groups are not being funded etcetera. And so how do these corporations become a monopoly of where funding goes and does not go? Well, what corporations are doing very strategically is having some of their executives, CEOs, presidents, and VPs become positioned on the governing committees, and boards of trustees of universities and colleges. So if you were to do a quick Google search of the governance board for any college or university, I can guarantee you that many will not be alumni or fellow retired faculty or community members, but rather they are going to be corporate representatives.¹³

- Parenti: Corporations have taken over universities in precisely the way Anthony describes. If you look at the board of trustees of universities or board of regents they are all drawn from, mostly from corporate America. Universities, at a certain point in the late nineteenth century - after the clergy class, ministers and religionists were eased out of the colleges and universities - were taken over by the corporate class. The board of trustees decides the curriculum, it decides the budget, and it decides the hiring and firing of professors according to their political orientation. So corporate America is involved in universities because it gains control over the university. They control the university by placing their people in the decision making positions, in empowered decision making positions and by chartering the university as a corporation which allows them to call upon the police powers of the state to protect their property, to protect the property interests of the university corporation.
- Marmol: University boards of governors or trustees hold considerable, overarching power over the university. It would seem that corporations, by having control over the governance boards of universities, are able to exercise a tremendous level of sway over every aspect of the university's operations. Might this be the central locus of corporate influence over universities?
- Nocella: Exactly, yes. Corporate representatives are sitting on the most important governance board possible at these colleges and universities. Upper executives of corporations are sitting on the boards of trustees; they are trustees now. In the last ten years or so, universities and colleges have felt major budget cuts globally. And I would say more so in North America than in any other region. So, these corporate representatives on these trustees' boards are determining what departments, what programs, what degrees are being cut. Who gets to have a tenure track position line offered for new faculty and who is not. Who gets to have the new computers. Who gets to be in the new building and who gets to be stuck in the old building. Who gets to have professional development and who does not get to have professional development. So, if you were to say what is the most important committee to be on in higher education, it is the trustees. Because the trustees are the ones who are hiring, firing, and eliminating positions as well

¹³ See Aronowitz, S. (2000). *The knowledge factory: Dismantling the corporate university and creating true higher learning*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

as hiring and firing the president of the university or the college as well as the chancellors and the provosts and the deans. They are the last ones. The buck ends with the trustees and if you go to any university or college you will see the presence of corporate identity at that level.

Maisuria: I can cite a specific example of what Anthony is describing in reference to one university that I know of in particular. The main donator to this university is very famous and he is one of the reasons that this university is not doing as badly financially as other institutions. This particular character is also a significant donator to the Conservative Party in the UK as well. So, he is very ideologically driven. He is very good friends with the Prime Minister, he is very good friends with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and in addition, he has a multitude of companies, overseas companies making him his multimillions. He is on the board of governors at this particular university; he is one of the key figures and he will have some reservations, I assume, about some of the things that may be taught in, for instance, things like critical sociology or critical education, because it ultimately means some of the things that might be taught in these modules and these courses mean that there is going to be a critique of his businesses and political ideology. So, there is potentially a conflict of interest. Now, it has not reached the point at which it is at in the United States of America, and as far as I know boards of governors and corporations do not have a big, overriding, or at least an overt influence in what is being taught, but certainly in the future they could, and this is very problematic, very problematic.

Marmol: Anthony and Alpesh, you have both mentioned that the government is defunding universities. This is something that is happening in the UK as well as in the United States, and here in Canada. What do you say to the idea that government officials or policy makers are deliberately creating a vacuum, defunding universities so that the private sector can come in? Because we know very well that the UK government, the US government, and the Canadian government all have plenty of money, they are just choosing to use it for other purposes while also refusing to collect adequate taxes from the very wealthy and corporations to cover the expense of higher education. So, the money is there. I am wondering, do you see any sort of, collusion might be a strong word, between business interests and government interests in defunding universities so that the private sector can come in and reap the benefits and make a profit?

Maisuria: Absolutely, and I do not think collusion is too much of a strong word at all. What we are seeing from the coalition government in the UK is an aggressive no-holds-barred neoliberalization of the university. So it is very much ideological in nature. I started this interview by saying we need to contextualize what is going on in a broader framework of neoliberalization and privatization, marketization and all of those things. Really what the government is doing is enforcing a particular ideology, an aggressive ideology – neoliberalism. They want free markets to be part of every single aspect of life. So the whole idea of universities being a public good or a common good, which exists to progress humanity or provide some kind of movement towards a more civil society, is simply not on the agenda – we are

far away from that vision for education. What they are interested in doing is getting rid of the idea of the university as a public institution to one that is a private institution. This is deeply ideological. This has got nothing to do with the fact that we have got to go through austerity measures. That is just simply a façade, simply a façade. There is plenty of money available. Our GDP is bigger than ever before. It is just that the government is choosing not to use that money to fund higher education. They would rather use that money to do something else: the Olympics, build a new train line and airport, renew the country's atomic missile program (despite signing the non-proliferation treaty), even spend millions on the Queens Jubilee! This is an ideological choice. Withdrawing funding from higher education means that they are leaving higher education open to the market and market forces. This is deeply ideological. It is what has been called the "businessification" of education, or "edu-business," or "higher education plc." These are all terms, which have been used to describe what is going on. It is deeply ideological.

Parenti: Now students today are finding that this process of incorporation is being carried to a new level. The public universities are being privatized piecemeal. The food contractors are privatized. You go to a university cafeteria and there is Starbucks, there is a McDonalds, and there is all this other crap that the students can now eat. The top administrative members of the university are getting salaries equal to those found in private corporations. They used to be paid modestly, much less than somebody in a giant corporation. Today they are getting seven figure salaries. So, it is beginning to resemble a corporation more and more in that respect. Private companies are coming in and taking over contracts, they are taking over research bids, and the like, and this is especially targeted against public universities.

Now we also have more and more private schools emerging, people getting rich from building private schools. And that has to be done, for corporate America, from their point of view. It has to be done because public institutions are socialist institutions. They are run and financed by the state, and the students can attend at affordable rates. Well that socialism has to be stamped out. The problem, you see, with a lot of these things, the post office, Social Security, they are under attack not because they do not work, but because they DO work. The University of California was one of the great universities in this country. It did work, it produced terrific students, it produced very capable and highly qualified faculty, and it produced first-rate research. It was working, and nobody was making a profit on it, so that had to stop. The cancer of socialism must be replaced with the destruction of capitalism. It is a piecemeal privatization by raising the tuition every year, doubling it, tripling it. In effect, this is privatizing the universities, so that it becomes less of a public institution and more of a privatized one, and it is a very successful and rational policy from the perspective of the ruling plutocracy.

It is the same policy that is destroying the post office. The trouble with the post office is that it worked; it used to. You could deliver a piece of mail from California to New York for 45 cents. Now what private contractor would ever

deliver it for 45 cents? None, unless they were getting subsidized by the government at an enormous rate. So you undermine the post office. You impose all sorts of liabilities on it, about its funding, its pensions, and impoverish it. But you see, it worked! As another example, once you start demonstrating that publicly owned, government-run railroads work, it becomes necessary to get rid of the railroads. You overprice them, you milk them out, privatize them and then you run them into the ground, coopting public funds. So you get socialism (funding by the many) to work for capitalism (profits for the few). You do not get the institution to work for the people. It is a very rational and consistent policy about which there is almost no discussion in the mainstream media.

Marmol: Michael, why should the public at large care about corporate control of the university? What do they have to lose?

Parenti: It is the same reason why they should care to have public control of utilities, and other components of the productive system. With the public control of the utilities, all the earnings go into the public budget and there is less tax burden for you. The utility earns its own money. It is less costly and there is better service, but nobody makes a profit! And that is what is so wrong about it as far as the corporations are concerned. It demonstrates that you do not need this parasite class siphoning off most of the income that is generated within the institution whether it is a private utility, a public utility, public university, or some other public service like railroads, the post office, or whatever. We should care because we should want better service: more democratic, more efficient, less expensive, less profit-driven service. People out in remote areas cannot get postal service if it is privately operated. Not if it is calculated in terms of how much profit can be rung out of this whole enterprise. So, people who cannot afford to send their kids to Yale, Harvard, Princeton or some private institution, now cannot afford to send them to public institutions either because the tuition has grown so immensely.

Marmol: I want to go back to what has been said about corporations being able to dictate which topics and subject matter is taught, as well as what departments receive funding and which do not. How does this sort of control over the curriculum affect students?

Hill: What they are effectively doing is narrowing the curriculum, is making the curriculum of higher education and of schools as instrumental, as economic, as vocational as they can. So for example, in different countries such as Britain, no longer do the humanities and arts subjects get direct funding in universities from the government, whereas subjects like science and business studies continue to get direct funding from the government. So the effects that we are seeing is that in Britain and in other countries throughout the world, we are seeing arts and humanities subjects closed down. I taught recently at Middlesex University and what we saw there was that the philosophy department closed down, probably the most famous philosophy department in Britain, certainly in terms of “continental philosophy” (as opposed to Anglo-American philosophy). Why? Because philosophy does not make money. Philosophy is of no apparent use to corporations and to capitalists. In fact, it is dangerous, philosophy is, and so is

sociology, and so to an extent are media studies. And so one of the problems that liberals, that socialists, that Marxists, that really anybody left of centre has with corporate control of universities is that it is narrowing the curriculum and attempting to perpetuate and to strengthen the dominant ideology of neoliberalism, which is that there is no alternative to this way of looking at the world and interacting with each other. This is especially so at “second-tier” universities, those with a mainly working-class student population, as opposed to the elite universities, where critique is developed and deemed appropriate for the “future” business and political and arts leaders.

Maisuria: It is deeply worrying what is going on. Ultimately what we are saying is that profit-making corporations are going to be funding and delivering higher education. Their *raison d'être* is to make a profit and fulfill their obligations to their shareholders. That means they are going to be orienting all their operations towards this aim. That means that, as Dave mentioned, there are going to be certain disciplines, like humanities and social sciences, with uncertain futures as they do not easily fit with the profit agenda. At the same time we are going to see a significant increase in funding for things like business studies, because these are the kinds of things that drive neoliberalism. Business studies, in the main, is uncritical of markets, it facilitates the entrepreneurialism, and the businessification of everything. Disciplines like history, education studies, sociology, and philosophy do not. So, in terms of the way that research may be funded or research may be oriented, well, it is going to be dictated by the body or individual that is funding that university. So it has huge repercussions on the institution itself, but also it means that students will not be given the opportunity to study certain subjects. They will not be able to have a holistic and rounded education. It means that they are going to be very directed and oriented towards the needs of that particular corporation.

Marmol: What you are saying is that any knowledge geared towards a deeper, more critical understanding of the world and the way it functions is going to be buried and devalued, while any knowledge contributing towards profit making is celebrated. Apparently what matters is how to perpetuate and reproduce the capitalist system while eliminating any possibility of critique. It is clear to see how this would stifle the ability of students to imagine or construct alternative visions for the future.

Maisuria: Absolutely, Emil. I think any hope of allowing university students to critique the injustices and the exploitation associated with capitalism and neoliberalism will not exist in a businessified and privately funded university. What we are seeing at the moment, in British universities, is corporations donating large sums of money. What we are ultimately going to see is the full privatization of universities. So they will not only be donating money to universities, they will actually be taking over universities. In those situations what we will have is a completely unregulated curriculum. We will see the aggressive advocacy of neoliberalism and dog-eat-dog mentality being promoted. Let me put it another way, you are not going to have a university which is being run by Rupert Murdoch's News International Corporation critiquing neoliberalism. You just are not going to have

that. What we are going to see is a very narrow, very restricted, perhaps prescribed curriculum in certain universities once they become fully privatized.

Marmol: What about faculty? How does corporate influence at the university impact them? What happens when a professor does not follow the dictations or the wishes of the corporation investing in that university? Can you describe the consequences faced by faculty when they fall out of line, or act against business interests? Please feel free to share any personal experiences you might be able to recount.

Parenti: They control what can be taught and what cannot be taught. They can control removing a professor or faculty member who is too troublesome, who raises too many challenging questions, who takes a too radical position on issues. How many communists are there with tenure in North American universities? Well, I can tell you in the United States, there are, I do not think there are any known, openly communist, and many just ordinary progressive and radical professors have been done in. I can tell you firsthand what happens to faculty. I was at the University of Vermont. I was voted for renewal of my contract unanimously by my department, by the council of deans, by the president and the vice president, but the board of regents voted me down 15-4, and they were made up mostly of corporate people with a few politicians, state legislators also thrown in because it was a public institution, but even the public institutions have the corporate mode of rule.

When you get something from Yale University in the mail (I got my PhD from Yale), it comes in and it says the Yale Corporation, or if it is from Harvard or Princeton, then, it is the Harvard Corporation, the Princeton Corporation.¹⁴ In short, the university IS a corporation. It is chartered by the state as a corporation.

Maisuria: As Michael explained there is a substantial amount of pressure put on faculty, which limits their ability to express their views openly. In the United States of America they have something called Campus Watch, which is a right-wing political organization that attacks those professors who do not toe the line. There is also The Bruin Alumni Association, another right-wing attack group. They paid students to essentially spy on their professors and sell “intelligence” that they gathered. And so what they managed to do from this is compile what is called the *Dirty Thirty* list of professors at UCLA, which led to some very serious repercussions, like death threats, and it was, you know, very, very serious stuff. These professors had fallen out of line, and they upset the right wing, neocons, and they paid the price. We are seeing similar things happening in the UK too. It is not as serious as that, but ultimately if university lecturers and university professors do not toe the line, well they are no good, they are no use to the university, which is ultimately being pushed in certain directions by the person, or the company, or the corporation that funds them. So, ultimately we are going to

¹⁴ See Trumbour, J. (1989). *How Harvard rules: Reason in the service of empire*. Boston, MA: South End Press.

have a whole raft of university lecturers being surveilled and “performance” monitored.

Hill: I would like to just briefly reiterate what Michael and Alpesh have already said because this point needs to be emphasized. What corporate control, commercial control of universities and of schools tries to do is to demonize, vilify, and exclude, and indeed punish Marxist teachers, socialist teachers, and lecturers and to remove what we do from the curriculum. And they have been very successful in different countries around the world. I visit Turkey regularly, and speak at academic conferences, trade unions and left activist meetings. Turkey is a good example, well, better to call it, a bad example, of where a neoliberalizing government, the AKP, under Recep Erdogan, is also pursuing (as is usually the case) a neoconservatizing agenda, especially in schools and universities, where, in recent years, secular and leftist teachers and faculty are feeling very much under threat.¹⁵

I can use myself as an example. I became a professor at the University of Northampton a few years back, and after I became a professor my head of department called me in and said, “Well David, now that you are a professor, you can do research for local companies!” To which my reply was, I will not mention the person’s name, I said, “Well, actually, I do not research for capital, I research against capital!”

Marmol: That is amazing! Good for you!

Hill: Thank you. My career took a temporary nosedive from there, but I have no regrets. I am not complaining at what I am saying, because my case is absolutely typical of radical educators, of those of us who question the status quo, of those of us who have views about different pasts, different presents, and different futures. What happens through this corporate control of universities and of schools is that radical educators get marginalized, moved on, disciplined, punished, dismissed, and that is extremely unhealthy in a democracy. Any democracy needs, any form of government needs, any form dominant ideology needs its critics, and that is what is gradually being strangled, gradually being forbidden within the academy.

I can give you lots of examples of very famous radical educators. For example, Terry Eagleton, at Manchester Metropolitan University, one of the most famous. Eagleton is a Marxist, and one of the most brilliant current writers, very famous,

¹⁵ See Gezgin, U.B., Inal K., & Hill, D. (eds.). (2014). *The Gezi revolt: People's revolutionary resistance against neoliberal capitalism in Turkey*. Brighton, England: Institute for Education Policy Studies; Inal, K., & Akkaymak, G. (eds.). (2012). *Neoliberal transformation of education in Turkey: Political and ideological analysis of educational reforms in the age of the AKP*. Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan; Hill, D. (ed.). (2013). *Immiseration capitalism and education: Austerity, resistance and revolt*. Brighton, England: Institute for Education Policy Studies; Hill, D. (2013, September 29). Gezi Park and Taksim Square: Reflections and reactions: Islamic conservatism, predatory neoliberalism and the continuing courage of the resistance. *Socialist Resistance*. Retrieved from <http://www.socialistresistance.org> Also online at http://www.ieps.org.uk/PDFs/Gezi_Article

writing on ideology and literary theory.¹⁶ He was moved on from one of his jobs. Many of us, many of my colleagues, I will say comrades, many of my comrades and radical colleagues have been similarly moved on. Indeed, I wrote about one of my “redundancies” (actually it was a dismissal, in “Brief Autobiography of a Bolshie Dismissed”).¹⁷ Union activists are particularly likely to find that their jobs are “restructured” so they have become “redundant.”

How does this removal of dissent affect students? They do not get much opportunity; there is not much opportunity for people to question, to engage in what Glenn Rikowski calls “fundamental critique.”¹⁸ Of course we can engage in minor modest criticism, we can engage in tweedledum - tweedledee choices at elections where all major parties- in the USA, France, Britain- think alike on major issues- all are neoliberal, all believe in and pursue cuts. But those who engage in *fundamental* critique of the current capitalist constitution of society and its control of education, those are, they are dangerous. Those educators are considered dangerous and find themselves sidelined, harassed, “moved on.” So that their/our, “pernicious”, anti-hegemonic, socialist and Marxist ideas remain relatively silenced.

Marmol: Earlier Alpers mentioned that university research would likely be dictated by, and oriented toward the needs of the university’s corporate funders. David then recounted the story of how the head of his department asked him to do research for local companies! It is difficult to imagine after what has been said so far, that corporations do not wield significant influence over the outcomes of research conducted at universities. Have any of you witnessed corporations having an effect on research outcomes? Let us imagine that corporations might say for example, “We want this result. We want the research to point in this direction. Make it happen!” Please feel free to speak on this point theoretically or with empirical examples.

Nocella: Of course, [laughing] you know, I think we all know that. It is the fact that the faculty and the research fellows do not want to admit that, right? You know, that is, what are the strings attached to this research? And so, if you are asked to research solar panels and why they are ineffective comparable to coal mining, strip mining, and you know, other gas forms of energy, then your results are already determined because the goal of your research has been directed prior to your even beginning, if that makes sense. Corporations are very much, [laughing]

¹⁶ Eagleton is described as “Britain’s leading Marxist literary critic” in Ford, L. & Macleod, D. (2008, February 7). Eagleton faces axe at Manchester. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/uk> See Eagleton’s work on ideology: Eagleton, T. (2007). *Ideology: An introduction* (2nd ed.). London, England: Verso.

¹⁷ See Hill, D. (1997). *Brief autobiography of a bolshie dismissed*. Brighton, England: Institute for Education Policy Studies. Retrieved from <http://www.ieps.org.uk/PDFs/bolsharticle.pdf>

¹⁸ See Rikowski, G. (2001, May). *The importance of being a radical educator in capitalism today*. Guest Lecture presented in Sociology of Education, The Gillian Rose Room, University of Warwick, Coventry. Retrieved from <http://www.ieps.org.uk/PDFs/rikowski2005a.pdf>; Hill, D. (2004). Books, banks and bullets: Controlling our minds - the global project of imperialistic and militaristic neo-liberalism and its effect on education policy. *Policy Futures in Education*, 2(3-4), pp. 504-522. doi:10.2304/pfie.2004.2.3.6

not wanting to waste time. They are based on efficiency and effectiveness. They are not going to want apolitical objective research.¹⁹ They are fine with saying, right out of the chute, “This is what we want you all to find and determine. Can you do this? We are giving you a six to twelve month span to do this.” Then after that six-month or twelve-month span what they want to do is take that data and provide it for legislation or some type of legal purpose. So most of the time the research funded by corporations is being used so that they can influence some type of national or global governance.

I would just kind of reiterate that higher education is the foundation of how society functions. Because of what we are taught in higher education, but now it is not even what we are taught, it is what we are programmed to think. What we have is this highly standardized normalcy of teaching or “schooling”; education does not exist in higher education as it is today. What we have today is schooling, and schooling is the perpetuation of standardized thinking. It is very much like cogs in a machine and that is why we think of corporate universities or corporate education as well as the academic industrial complex and how they both play off of each other, the two concepts, but they are very different.²⁰ Corporate universities are not always in every institution. Corporate influence is not always present within higher education within the two year schools, within community colleges, while you do see corporate universities very much present in research intuitions such as the University of Toronto, McMaster University, University of Oxford, University of California Los Angeles, Harvard University, Princeton University, New York University, and Cornell University.²¹

So why are corporate universities interested in these institutions specifically? They have the faculty that are currently making and suggesting certain policies, for example, environmental, health care, humane research policies, as well as transnational labour and trade policies. These are the individuals that are at the UN making expert opinions, right? Where do you think they exist? They exist in higher education. They are professors, and these professors are being bought and sold by universities and being bought by corporate interests. So, many of these corporations are saying, for example, “Well, we will give you a \$500,000 grant for the next two years to do this particular research and not to do this particular research,” and I think that is very telling with regard to what is being taught to us in undergraduate and graduate classes. So there are going to be far fewer classes addressing environmental justice and environmental movements, and there is going to be a lot more attention paid to energy resources sponsored by Exxon

¹⁹ See Nocella, A. J., Best, S., & McLaren, P. (Eds.). (2010). *Academic repression: Reflections from the academic-industrial complex*. Edinburgh, Scotland: AK Press.

²⁰ See Washburn, J. (2005). *University Inc.: The corporate corruption of higher education*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

²¹ See Aronowitz, S. (2000). *The knowledge factory: Dismantling the corporate university and creating true higher learning*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Mobil or Shell, for instance, and it is going to be backed and supported by the Environmental Protection Agency of the United States. So, we see the relationship between government and corporations and how they are influencing particular research within higher education. Such research then, after it is done by exploited graduate students and faculty members, is then pushed into government legislation at a very cheap rate. So corporations are getting very cheap research and as a consequence we are going to be focusing on particular research topics and a lot less on others. Also, I would like to add, we are going to have far fewer tenure track faculty and a great deal more visiting professors as well as research fellows doing that research. So if you get out of line and you come up with a particular result that these corporations, trustees and government are not in favor of, then they are going to hire somebody else to complete your research.²²

- Maisuria: There is a writer named George Monbiot who has written on aspects of this, and we are starting to see this emerging in universities. One of the industries that we can use as an example is the pharmaceutical industry. I am thinking of one company in particular that funds lots of medical research. It is a hugely profit making enterprise. Now, it would run against their interests to have research, which basically says that their products do not do what they are supposed to do. So in terms of funding of research and determining the outcomes of research, what we can certainly point towards is the potential of engineering results. Certainly within the medical industry, but the more that corporations encroach into education research and educational institutions, there more we will see of this. There is absolutely no doubt about that. We have got to keep in mind that the whole *raison d'être* of profit making corporations is to make money, and what that will mean is they will do anything to basically make sure that they make as much profit as possible, maximizing profit, and if that means funding certain research projects and not funding other research projects, so be it. If that also means that they have to engineer the outcomes of these research projects, I am sure they will do that. This is not something that is too far in the future, and this is all as a result of the private sector and profit making corporations being implicated in university business.
- Marmol: It is clear how the scenarios you are describing could have serious, far-reaching consequences because the information the public will be receiving about corporate activities and products has the potential of being highly inaccurate and self-serving. If, for instance, corporations can affect research outcomes and show that their pharmaceutical products are safe and efficacious, irrespective of whether they actually are, then other corporations can make similar claims such as, “Our energy extraction methods are clean and safe for the environment,” “The genetically modified food we are producing is good for your health,” etcetera.
- Maisuria: Yes, absolutely. One of the prominent examples that we can point to here is the potentially hugely scary prospect of oil companies funding research. Ultimately

²² See Nocella, A. J., & Gabbard, D. (Eds.). (2013). *Policing the campus: Academic repression, surveillance, and the Occupy movement*. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing.

what they want to say is that what they are doing is not environmentally problematic. If they are funding research, they are going to want to show that their activity is not destroying the earth. Just take a look at the fracking debate. It is difficult to trust those studies that purportedly show it is harmless. I am thinking of the example at the University of Texas where my point is exemplified.²³

Marmol: Just to briefly share a relevant example. At Stanford University a meta-analysis was conducted that purportedly showed that organic food is no better for you than conventionally grown food. It just so happens that Stanford has deep ties to the genetically modified organisms (GMO) and agribusiness food industry.²⁴

Maisuria: Sure. [laughs]

Marmol: The thing is that their own research findings clearly demonstrate that organic food contains much less pesticide than conventionally grown food, and in that way it is better for you and the environment, but that was not emphasized in the press release put out by the university. So even though the research demonstrated that organic food is better by at least some significant measure, the results were manipulated in such a way as to show there was no difference between the two.²⁵ It would be interesting if you wanted to look at that. Another great, but unfortunate example, is what happened to Ignacio Chapela at University of California Berkeley when GMO and agribusiness food companies did not agree with his research findings.²⁶ The incident caused him years of turmoil and nearly ruined his career.

Maisuria: Yeah, I mean, so what we are saying is when corporations get involved at that kind of level of educational research, they can not only massage results, they can actually manufacture results, which are beneficial to their own interests.

Marmol: Sounds like Herman and Chomsky's *Manufacturing Consent*. [Both laugh]

Maisuria: Absolutely, it does, but this is Masuria's version. [Both laugh]

²³ See Connor, K., Galbraith, R., & Nelson B. (2012, July 23). Contaminated inquiry: How a university of Texas fracking study led by a gas industry insider spun the facts and misled the public. Retrieved from <http://public-accountability.org/2012/07/contaminated-inquiry/>

²⁴ See the following article and links within: Stanford's "spin" on organics allegedly tainted by biotechnology funding: Scientists tied to tobacco industry propaganda, and funding from Monsanto, turn attention to organic food. (2012, September 12). Retrieved from <http://www.cornucopia.org/2012/09/stanfords-spin-on-organics-allegedly-tainted-by-biotechnology-funding/>

²⁵ See Holzman, D. C. (2012). Organic food conclusions don't tell the whole story. *Environmental Health Perspectives*, 120(12), 1. Retrieved from <http://ehp.niehs.nih.gov>

²⁶ See Rowell, A. (2009, May 7). Mexico corn contamination: How Monsanto & University of California tried to silence Dr. Ignacio Chapela. Retrieved from <http://www.organicconsumers.org>; Tonak, A. (2004, June 26-28). The profit motive, academic freedom and the case of Ignacio Chapela. Retrieved from <http://www.counterpunch.org>; Burrell, C. (2005, May 21). Berkeley / Embattled UC teacher is granted tenure / Critic of campus' ties with biotech lost initial bid. *The San Francisco Chronicle*. Retrieved from <http://www.sfgate.com>

Marmol: This has been absolutely fantastic to be able to speak with all of you on a topic of such pressing importance, and to hear your incisive perspectives on a variety of questions relating to corporate influence on universities. We are, however, running short on time. I was wondering if any of you have closing thoughts or comments?

Hill: Sure Emil, I would like to end up on a positive note. The positive note is that with the current crisis of austerity capitalism we have seen an increasing number of protests. We have seen magnificent responses in Quebec for example. Also, I spend a lot of time in Athens, and I have been tear-gassed and stun-grenaded together with a hundred thousand other demonstrators in Athens. I have also been tear-gassed in Ankara, in May 2012, in protests that led to the famous “Gezi Park” revolt.²⁷ So, throughout the world, especially in Southern Europe, and I might say in Quebec as well, and in the last three years in Britain, too, led initially by students, what we are seeing is that students, and faculty, and populations, and trade unions are getting off their butts. What we are seeing is a huge disjunction, a huge gap between what the media and the mainstream politicians say, “there is no alternative, that were all in this together.” So this is what they are saying on the one hand, but the material conditions of people’s existences, the way students and our communities and families live, we are actually seeing that there must be an alternative. Why is it we who are paying for the crisis? Why is it that education in schools and in universities, despite the valiant attempts of radical educators, why is it that “enterprise” is now a compulsory part of the curriculum in some countries? Why is this subject - one might say, subjectivity, of entrepreneurship, of aggressive economic individualism, being pushed whereas critical subjects are being reduced in time?

For example, in the teacher education system in England and Wales – now, tellingly, called “teacher training” – most critical thought, and subjects such as sociology, child development psychology, learning theory, the politics and philosophy of education have been excised from the curriculum.²⁸ But valiant teacher educators and schoolteachers persist in trying to develop critical, egalitarian perspectives.²⁹

²⁷ See Gezgin, U.B., İnal K., & Hill, D. (eds.). (2014). *The Gezi revolt: People's revolutionary resistance against neoliberal capitalism in Turkey*. Brighton, England: Institute for Education Policy Studies; Hill, D. (2013, September 29). Gezi Park and Taksim Square: Reflections and reactions: Islamic conservatism, predatory neoliberalism and the continuing courage of the resistance. *Socialist Resistance*. Retrieved from <http://www.socialistresistance.org>, also online at [http://www.ieps.org.uk/PDFs/Gezi Article](http://www.ieps.org.uk/PDFs/Gezi%20Article)

²⁸ See Hill, D. (2007). Critical teacher education, New Labour in Britain, and the global project of neoliberal capital. *Policy Futures in Education*, 5(2), pp. 204-225. doi: 10.2304/pfie.2007.5.2.204; Hill, D., & Boxley, S. (2007). Critical teacher education for economic, environmental and social justice: An ecosocialist manifesto. *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, 5(2), 28-77. Retrieved from <http://www.jceps.com>

²⁹ See Canaan, J., Hill, D., & Maisuria, A. (2013). Resistance in England. In D. Hill (ed.), *Immiseration capitalism and education: Austerity, resistance and revolt* (pp. 155-181). Brighton, England: Institute for Education Policy Studies; Malott, C., & Agostinone-Wilson, F. (2013). Resistance in the USA. In D. Hill (ed.), *Immiseration capitalism and education: Austerity, resistance and revolt* (pp. 196-216). Brighton, England: Institute for Education Policy Studies; Robertson, L. H. (2014, March). *Teaching for transformation, diversity and equality, in the teacher*

And, so, there is hope. There is massive protest around much of the world and I am very hopeful that through organization, through anger, through analysis, that is to say, Marxist analysis, through activism, through organization, that we together, students and workers will unite to replace the current system of governance of universities, and indeed the current system of governance of countries.

Marmol: I am also very hopeful that the eventual outcome will be positive and that we can use this crisis to bring about the type of change that all of us would like to see. I believe our survival depends upon it.

Maisuria: There is one thing that I just wanted to add, which is a growing movement in the UK, and I add this by way of being anti-fatalistic. Ok, so, we could say, there is this juggernaut, there is this junta of corporations now encroaching into the public university and there is nothing we can do about it, BUT actually there is an awful lot we can do about it. There is a growing and emerging movement in the UK called Free Universities, and it is not only in the UK, it is across Europe. If you simply do a Google search, and if you start to type in free universities you will see that there are free universities cropping up all over the place. There is an example I can draw on here, which kind of leads us to be more positive and optimistic. University education does not have to be funded in the traditional kind of sense. The Social Science Centre in Lincoln is an initiative which is just growing, it has just begun in September this year, and the Social Science Centre in Lincoln is basically a university which is nonprofit making and it has virtually no revenue. It is very much like a cooperative. Basically what has happened in the UK is that there is a whole bunch of people who are professors that have reached 65 and they have been sacked. There is a huge pool of brilliant professors, who have essentially been put onto the scrap heap when they hit 65 and cost too much money and are too critical. What they feel is that they have got an awful lot still to offer. Many of these people have now contributed to the Social Science Centre, the SSC. What they do is they volunteer their time to teaching courses, which are comparable to those taught at standard public universities or state universities. So you can essentially do a bachelor of arts in sociology at the university, at the Social Science Centre for completely free. There is no money involved at all. There are contributions, which come from its members. Students do not pay a fee. It is not driven by the profit motive, in other words it is driven by a desire to provide education as something which is free, as something which is good, and something which is an entitlement. This is a concrete and empirical example of how educational institutions do not have to be funded by profit making corporations, and it is something we can use as a beacon of hope.

Marmol: And to me that sounds revolutionary. I applaud those efforts. It is refreshing to hear about spaces being created where education and learning are being separated from profitmaking. Thank you all very much again for joining me today.

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