

Brian Simon and Marxist Educational History

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Abstract

After World War II, British educational history has undergone transformation under the influence of Marxist history. Brian Simon's four volumes of educational history works are known as the classic work of Marxist educational history. The four volumes also made Brian Simon a world-renowned historian of education. Starting from Brian Simon's educational history research and educational practice movement, this paper analyzes how he uses Marxist theories and methods to explain the educational history, so as to provide some experience for us to understand the western marxist educational history.

Keywords

Brian Simon; British educational history; Marxist educational history; Working class.

1. Introduction

For people in Britain and other countries, the history of British education means Brian Simon. His reputation depends on two factors, the first is his publishing records. So far, he has written more than 30 books and 100 articles and comments. Second, as a member of the British Communist Party, he actively participated in the domestic social education movement from the perspective of the working class. In fact, the two are so closely intertwined that if you want to better understand his Marxist educational history research, you must start with a brief description of his life experience and the background of the times. Brian Simon is neither a closed scholar nor a historical observer far away from educational practice. He explored hard in the research and practice of educational history, trying to establish a close relationship between history and social real life, and wanted to turn this relationship into the key to explain and promote the development of the current real society.

2. Conditions for the Reform of Traditional Education History

As the historian E. h. Carr said, "historians are the product of history and society before they start writing. People who study history should look at historians from this dual fact". The 20th century experienced was a historical stage in which ideas and social movements collide with each other. The international status of British imperialism was shaky, The two world wars destroyed the material and ideological basis of the western world, and changing the tradition had become a popular concept after World War II. Under the influence of this social atmosphere, the traditional British educational history had gradually transformed under the influence of internal and external factors.

2.1. External Thrust

The involvement of social science research has played an important role in the transformation of western educational history. In the second half of the 20th century, there were two major changes in history, one was the transformation from objective history to new history after World War II, and the other was the change of new history to Postmodern History after the 1970s. These two changes renovated the territory of western historiography and affected the research field of educational history. During this period, the research on economic history, social history, children's history, women's history and family history rose one after another.

British historiography has completed an innovation. In addition, ASA Briggs, a famous British historian, suggested that educational historians should pay attention to the innovation in the field of history and believe that the reform will provide a good reference for expanding the current research field of educational history, It emphasizes that the research of educational history should become an important part of social history research. Therefore, the change of historiography in the 20th century provided a good external environment for the transformation of British educational historiography.

In addition, under the influence of the new historical trend, American educational historians took the lead in challenging the traditional educational history, and "revised" along two routes. These two trends of revisionism merged into a torrent of reform in American educational history in the 20th century. This torrent reached Canada in 1966, Britain in 1968 and Australia in 1970. Canada and Australia have reacted strongly to this change, while Britain is much calmer because of its strong historical academic tradition, many British historians believe that the change of history is gradual rather than sudden. In a slightly calm response, a so-called new educational historiography reform is quietly taking root in Britain.

2.2. Internal Dilemma

British traditional educational history was facing various crises. Firstly, it mainly recorded the educational thoughts and activities of great figures, important educational policies and events, which will inevitably become a historical hymn of national educational progress. It limited the scope of educational history research; Secondly, influenced by the Positivist Historiography, it attaches great importance to the authenticity of historical materials, which limited the exertion of individual subjectivity in the research, and makes the works of educational history pale and superficial in the level of understanding. As a result, the traditional educational history has almost completely lost the function of interpretation, it not only does not help people correctly understand the educational history, but also has no ability to enlighten people to understand the real educational phenomenon and predict the trend of future educational development. Therefore the social function of educational history has been lost.

3. Brian Simon's View on the History of Education

For a long time, established universities in the UK had refused to recognize the legal academic status of educational history and often ignored the research of educational history. Therefore, the study of educational history often existed in full-time teacher training colleges. At that time, scholars engaged in the study of educational history didn't have the same willingness to change the traditional educational history as the United States. This critical change was finally initiated by radical Marxists. From the standpoint of the labor movement, Simon used the analytical method of Marxist class struggle to re-examine the basic path of educational development since the British Industrial Revolution, and put forward a strong criticism to the orthodox study of educational history.

3.1. Bottom up

With the rise of post-war Marxist historiography, Simon reviewed his previous experience in the comprehensive movement of British secondary education. He didn't think that the education of the working class was the result of the national charity movement. He believed that the traditional history of education was in the perspective of the national government and didn't analyze it from the standpoint of working class. So with the help of his good friend, Krugman, he began to collect historical materials related to working-class education and dig out the historical story of the working-class struggling for education. In his first two volumes, this "bottom-up" feature is very significant. For example, in its first volume, it contains a strong element of "bottom-history". The word "workers" or "working class" appears in most chapter

titles, mainly about the educational struggle of British working class since the late 18th century. In the second volume, he continued the theme. He believed that the Balfour Education Act of 1902 was, to some extent, a conspiracy of the bourgeoisie to curb the labor movement and carry out educational struggle. In his works, he depicted an educational history that was different from the "educational history of continuous progress and development" put forward in orthodox textbooks, but an educational history that started from the bottom people and constantly plays a game with the bourgeoisie to strive for the right to education. This analysis was a kind of fresh air for British educational history at that time. As Raphael Samuel commented, Simon's research was "the history of the people". It broadened the research scope, expanded the research object, made use of new historical materials, gave a new picture of historical knowledge, and provided an alternative version .

3.2. Class Conflict

Simon criticizes the traditional methods of educational history and understands the educational needs between different classes. In his opinion, the research is not a simple accumulation of a series time, characters and events. Behind it is "who should receive education? How should high-quality education be distributed? What level of education should each class provide?" And a series of questions. Simon introduced the method of class analysis and believed that "the modern education system is a field full of different interests and purposes of classes ". He stressed that the track separation system of the British education system is closely related to the phenomenon of social class stratification, and used Marxist ideology and historical class conflict theory to analyze the development of education, The dichotomy of British traditional secondary education makes the elite class study in grammar schools, while the remaining students study in modern secondary schools with low social status in the future. Therefore, from the perspective of class, he believes that "in the protracted war against the privileged class, the popularization of comprehensive schools will win." In his works, the main force for the development of education in Britain in the 19th century was the interests and conflicts among different classes such as the emerging bourgeoisie, the working class and the land aristocracy. As Aldrich commented, the history of education in England written by Brian Simon can be understood from the perspective of class conflict.

3.3. Holistic View of History

Simon believes that education is the sum of all that have a certain impact on human and social development. To this extent, when looking at the research scope of educational history, we should not only focus on the formal educational institution such as school, but should expand to various fields such as art, society, religion and so on. Therefore, Simon believes that educational historians in the current era should cultivate a creative concept of educational history. Some scholars believe that Simon's works have reshaped the history of British education. Under the influence of the holistic view of history, which makes the scope of his works very wide, but highlights its main line and provides help for readers to grasp its key points. In his first two works of educational history, he focuses on the educational struggle from the perspective of the working class, while in the latter two volumes, It is mainly based on the political game involved in the process of the comprehensive movement of British secondary education.

3.4. View of Social History

Simon was deeply influenced by Freire Clark's thought of education and social relations when he participated in teacher training. The view of social history affected his creation of educational history. He believes that the traditional research generally records the deeds of national policies and great figures, lacks vitality, small readership, it is difficult to attract the general public. In view of this, Simon tries to write a series of real educational history stories

closely related to ordinary people to attract more attention. Therefore, based on the collected historical materials, he reproduces the historical scene of education in the 19th and 20th centuries, takes the people at the bottom who actively participate in the educational struggle as the protagonists of his works, and makes the complex events of various power games in the field of education staged again in the form of stories. He turned his works into a research orientation of social history, hoping that it can attract the public to pay attention to the educational reform and lead them to participate in the educational reform. Simon's works were affirmed and praised by many historians and sociologists as soon as they came out.

4. Conclusion

Brian Simon's work has been affirmed and praised. When he criticized the paradigm of traditional educational history research, he used Marxist theories and methods to explain the changes of British education. In his interpretation, the role of the state is not gentle and neutral, but often persecutes the interests of the working class. He often started research from the educational issues with social debate, explained the social inequalities ignored in education, and opened up a new world for the study of educational history at that time. At the same time, the intersection between history and social history makes its education have distinct characteristics. Under the guidance of Marxist theories and methods, he completely denied the liberal model of social progress and believed that the relationship between education and social change was based on class conflict. Then in the 1970s, when most people became more and more pessimistic about the prospect of drastic change, Simon put forward the view of cooperating with sociologists and critical theorists. He believed that despite many setbacks, history showed that success would eventually belong to the working class who insisted on fighting for education, As he wrote on the last page of his fourth book: "history has constructed a great spirit, including the understanding of all the mysteries of human potential. History has continued to struggle and strive to ensure that everyone can enjoy comprehensive education, including humanities and science education".

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