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Learned helplessness occurs when an animal or non-human animal is repeatedly exposed to an aversive stimulus that cannot be escaped. Consequently, the animal will stop attempting to avoid the stimulus and behave as though he or she is helpless to avoid or change the situation, even when these opportunities are present. This behaviour can lead to effects on emotional health, such as depression, low self-esteem, and suicidal ideation.

Inherent in the capitalist education system is the perceived, unquestionable authority of the instructor over the pupil. It is within this hierarchical relationship that the student runs the risk of acquiring learned helplessness. This outcome is to be expected within an education system that holds as its objective the moulding of young, free, creative minds, into subservient, spiritless masses intended to serve the ‘workforce’.

From early on, the student recognises the futility of trying to assert his or her will against the rule of the instructor, as in most cases it will continue to be denied. It is from this constant denial of individual or collective (such as the consensus of students in a

classroom setting) autonomy that the student or students will develop a defeatist mindset, i.e. they will begin to believe they will inevitably be defeated by the 'superiors' despite any efforts they might take to promote their own interests. Therefore, the student will often subordinately accept the teacher's authority, even bearing the most senseless of rules, as well as the consequences for breaking them.

This form of institutionalised conditioning can only be eradicated by a radical social revolution and subsequently an educational revolution, whereby capitalist education is replaced by an anarchist form. It will be then, that one's will, spirit, and individuality, as well as his or her true human potential can be realised.

References

- Kendra Cherry, Learned Helplessness, see www.psychology.about.com/b/2009/06/08/learned-helplessness-psychology-definition-of-the-week.htm
- Christopher Peterson, Steven F. Maier and Martin E.P. Seligman, *Learned Helplessness: A Theory for the Age of Personal Control* (NY, Oxford University Press, 1995).