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# HARVARD'S BLACKBOARD REVOLUTIONARIES

CONSIDER this paradox: In American public education, "excellence" is something the masses force on the elite. Most professional educators oppose reforms such as competency testing, but right now these reforms are advancing anyway because parents and politicians are playing unusually aggressive roles. Clearly this situation cannot continue. Eventually the laymen will be distracted by other concerns and the professionals will reassert themselves. If, by then, the professionals have internalized the laymen's norms, that won't be so bad. But if professional ideology is unaltered, education will then drift backward.

That's why it's so depressing to read the *Harvard Educational Review*, the most influential educationist journal. The *Review* speaks for and to an unrepentant professional constituency—one whose chief regret about the educational upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s is that they did not go far enough. This constituency sees today's back-to-basics movement (to quote a *Review* editorial) as laying "the foundation . . . for racism to be fashionable again." It explicitly seeks to politicize the schools: In the words of another editorial, "to resculpt education and make it a useful tool for social change."

What kind of "social change"? The *Review*'s 1985 special issue on "International Education," for example, has an account of how a faction of radical young Jesuits, inspired by the teachings of Brazilian neo-Marxist Paulo Freire, took over a school in El Salvador and ousted traditionalist Jesuit teachers. The article purports to be a scholarly study, but in fact it is written entirely from the radicals' point of view.

The issue also includes a piece by

Mr. Uzzell is an editorial writer for the *Scrapps-Howard News Service*.

Tanzanian despot Julius Nyerere that amounts to a press release for his country's statist school system; an essay-review that takes for granted the premise that Western wealth causes Third World poverty; and a memoir of the Spanish Civil War by an International Brigade veteran who evidently has the same high opinion of Stalinist Russia today as he had in 1936. On the other hand, the issue has a sympathetic account of fugitive academic seminars in Jaruzelski's Poland—the sort of underground intellectual life that might now be necessary in Spain if the International Brigade's side had won.

That issue seems even-handed compared with the 1984 special issue on "Education and the Threat of Nuclear War." Not one of the *Review*'s 14 articles on the subject advocated any of the major alternatives to disarmament, such as deterrence or strategic defense; in fact, not one even gave these concepts more than a scornful sentence or two of discussion.

The *Review*'s editors realized that this topic was "intrinsically political and controversial" and that therefore "the decision to teach about it . . . raises questions about the purpose of education." Some would say that one question is whether an educator should free his students' minds or shackle them to his political views; but not the editors: They only ask whether the

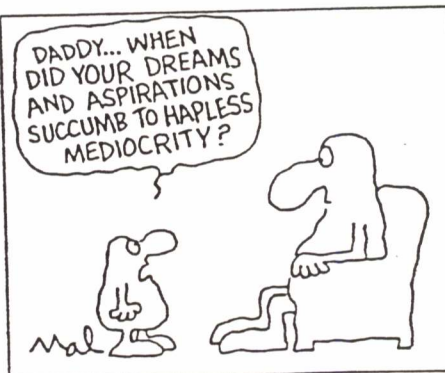
subject demands "merely awareness, or activism as well." Their only (mild) doubt, in other words, is whether they should mobilize other people's children; indoctrinating them they take for granted.

Not surprisingly, the *Review* is a stronghold of what might be called "liberation pedagogy"—the educationist equivalent of liberation theology—in which Marx is the dominant theorist, though usually at second or third hand. One of liberation pedagogy's leading lights, often cited and praised in the *Harvard Review*, is Paulo Freire.

Besides being a Jesuit and a neo-Marxist, Freire is a former advisor to UNESCO and the World Council of Churches. His vision of education, explicitly utopian and revolutionary, is so intimately tied to what most non-Marxists would call "propaganda" that he even coins a new word for it: "conscientization." In books such as *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire offers conscientization as a weapon of class struggle against "myths indispensable to the preservation of the status quo" such as "the myth of private property as fundamental to personal human development." Traditional schooling, he says, sustains such myths because its true, hidden purpose is "domestication." By contrast, "the revolutionary process is eminently educational in character," though with some chilling reservations: Even after a popular revolution has come to power, "dialogue between the former oppressors and the oppressed . . . continues to be impossible."

Freire denies any private realm of conscience or intellect beyond the reach of his revolutionary re-educators: "'Cultural revolution' takes the total society to be reconstructed, including all human activities, as the object of its remolding action." Thus his lyrical

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tion on contraception, abortion, childbirth, and venereal disease, on the theory that after stuffing the minds of students year after year with sexual indoctrination, the sex educators can nevertheless prevent teen and pre-teen pregnancies by such instruction. The Alan Guttmacher Institute, a major sex-education organization, goes even further and places the blame for today's pre-teen and teen pregnancies on American manufacturers for not developing better contraceptives for sexually active students. In fact it is organizations like the Guttmacher Institute that must bear much of the blame.

In 1979, it was determined that five million sexually educated adolescent girls between the ages of 15 and 19 engaged in sexual intercourse. In 1980, 1.2 million pregnancies occurred in these sexually active 15- to 19-year-old girls; 440,000 of these pregnancies ended in abortion. Sex educators seem to be unable to understand that their own programs are partly responsible for the pregnancies, abortions, perversions, suicides, and psychological as well as venereal diseases that are epidemic in today's youth. They continue to claim that they are protecting young people from the influence of sexually inhibited parents and outmoded religious teachings, though those "outmoded" teachings are often confirmations of natural and normal sexual developments. Today's children and adolescents need an educational system that upholds the family and basic Judaeo-Christian morality—a morality that supports the struggle for existence and sustains civilized life, rather than undermining it. □

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admiration for Fidel Castro and Che Guevara—especially the latter, whose "humility and capacity to love . . . made possible his communion with the people."

The popularity of such a theorist at a Harvard graduate school suggests that academia is still moving leftward. And of course radicalizing graduate schools of education can be a fruitful enterprise: Radical educationists hope to advance from their university beachheads into the elementary and secondary schools.

That won't be easy: At present the public schools seem more interested in

computer-literacy courses and "adopt-a-school" programs for Fortune 500 companies than in revolutionary consciousness-raising. Marxist pedagogy's short-run prospects look bleak.

But the long run may be quite different. The "centrist" school-reform movement now dominant is strikingly similar to the educational climate of the 1950s, which preceded the surge of counterculture activism from which we are still recovering. At this movement's core is a moral vacuum: Like the bland consensus of the Eisenhower era, it has little vision of the ends of education beyond careerist "success."

Freire disciples such as Henry Giroux know how to exploit such weaknesses in the reform movement. Giroux, cited in the *Harvard Review* as a leader of those seeking to "provide a secure underpinning for a radical pedagogy," shows impressive adaptability in both theory and tactics. His latest book, *Education under Siege*, not only repudiates the economic determinism usually associated with Marxist views but shrewdly accuses the neoconservatives of materialism, arguing that they "have no program for empowerment, only for providing human capital able to make American business viable once more in the world market." Giroux even attacks "the dangerous centralization of power in American life," in an implied criticism of neoconservative doubts about local control and of neoconservative willingness to depend on government rather than parents as the guarantor of educational quality. He thus taps into the popular desire for local control and parental choice that has been at the heart of the Old Right's educational message. But his appeal is totally opportunistic and quite insincere, as can be seen from his enthusiasm for Nicaragua's Sandinistas.

Interestingly, Giroux expresses deep respect for modern American educationism's most influential theorist, John Dewey. "It can be shown," he says, "that Dewey's educational thought closely approximates the best of Marxist and radical education theory." Howls of protest would greet any conservative critic of the public schools who said that. The education establishment should spend less effort on defaming its conservative critics and more on reconsidering the philosophical premises that make one of the nation's leading schools of education so hospitable to blackboard revolutionaries. □

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