

What Education Can and Cannot Learn from Business and Industry: More of the Same!

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Control of the schools has long been recognized as the key to social-political-economic dominance of a people.

ONE SORTS through one's intellectual, attitudinal, and affective inventory for clues to a reasoned and less than violent response to the theme of this issue. Like many others it displays the cognitive rigor of a nonstandardized ink blot, the social significance of a bowling tournament, and the exquisite sensitivity of the pre-bout remarks of a professional wrestler. Is this a three or four martini product? What desperate editorial condition led to the vain attempt to dress up, disguise, and resell this octogenarian turkey?

From John D. Runkle, Booker T. Washington, John Dewey, Alfred North Whitehead, Thorsten Veblen, and on through to Conant, Marland, and numberless others, the question of the substantive relationship between education and "the world of work" has been worn to a fragmented frazzle. The absolutely predictable functional losers in these shopworn debates are those like Dewey who argued against locking the schools into the form and content of the economic system within which they function. He and others, such as Randolph Bourne, asserted

that such industrial-scholastic integration would effectively freeze social-economic evolution in its temporal posture, thus assuring "social predestination." Of course they were entirely correct in these assertions. But they were entirely incorrect in their belief that the social-economic system which contained the schools would tolerate any large public enterprise producing human products not conforming to a configuration compatible with the system's aspiration for infinite longevity.

Formal public educational institutions within any social order serve primarily as instruments which interpret and promote skills, knowledge, and attitudes which will maintain the system intact. These institutions must conserve the current and traditional social, political, and economic values of the system. Moreover they must, on demand, assist in accommodating large scale public adaptation to such constant and/or periodic irritants as war; inflation; recession; depression; sponsored covert international violence; revelations of deep and widespread civic corruption; officially sanctioned overt and covert violence as a national political tactic; malignant neglect of the young, the poor, the aged, and the culturally different; and finally, the relentless impoverishment of the lower and middle classes in the name of the ultimate euphemism, "growth."

Control Over Hearts and Minds

It is important to note that the public schools are joined in these ominous educational tasks by many other organized aggregations of elements and energies directed at influencing the ways in which people think and act. These include the family; religious organizations; social welfare agencies; manufacturers, distributors, and processors of commodities and raw materials; newspapers and other print media; television and radio stations and networks; the military and other government establishments; basic government instruments such as the judiciary, legislative, and executive branches; professional, labor, and fraternal organizations, as well as sundry special interest propaganda and pressure groups.

The fundamental support functions of the combined formal and informal educational systems may be observed across ideologically varying social-political-economic systems. Thus, in patently monolithic conditions such as the U.S.S.R. or the Peoples' Republic of China, little pretense at ideological freedom and deviation is evidenced in the instructional utterances of the Young Communists League or the Red Guard. However if "both sides" are presented, the "other" side is invariably the target of vitriolic and bitter polemics. In "free enterprise-democratic" systems such as ours, however, considerably more attention must be paid to the preservation of illusions of public participation, discretion, and influence. Convergence on positions of systemic support is

inevitable and mandatory via one route or another for all elements of the instructional system.

Thus, the question "What Education Can and Cannot Learn from Business and Industry" offers at best a shallow confrontation with organizational, strategic, and tactical considerations. The exercise appears to us to be devoid of significance. Focused on predetermined and essentially conservative social-political and economic ends, such speculations have little to offer those concerned with fundamental issues of human welfare.

Raising the question once again is a most proximate and blatant example of the promotion of a system-serving falsehood—in this instance the assertion that "education" has *substantial* rather than *tactical* discretion in what it "Can and Cannot Learn from Business and Industry."

Finally, it seems appropriate to paraphrase the alleged motto of recently converted and convicted Watergate felon Charles Colson. Said to have been prominently displayed on the wall of his White House office, it read (with the exception of one substituted word) as follows: "When you've got them by the *schools* their hearts and minds will surely follow."

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