Public Schools, the Fixation of Belief, and Social Control

Do Schools Enlighten, Empower, and Educate?

The following are some passages which counter the popular belief that state-sponsored public schools educate and enlighten children:

- "The most erroneous assumption is to the effect that the aim of public education is to fill the young of the species with knowledge and awaken their intelligence…Nothing could be further from the truth. The aim of public education is not to spread enlightenment at all; it is simply to reduce as many individuals as possible to the same safe level, to breed and train a standardized citizenry, to put down dissent and originality. That is its aim in the United States, whatever the pretensions of politicians…and that is its aim everywhere else." (H.L. Mencken)
- **School, as it was built, is an essential support system for a model of social engineering** that condemns most people to be subordinate stones in a pyramid that narrows as it ascends to a terminal of control. (Dumbing us Down, John Taylor Gatto)
- **Schools are intended to produce, through the application of formulas, formulaic human beings whose behavior can be predicted and controlled.** To a very great extent schools succeed in doing this, but in a national order increasingly disintegrated, in a national order in which the only "successful" people are independent, self-reliant, confident, and individualistic (because community life which protects the dependent and the weak is dead and only networks remain), the products of schooling are, as I've said, irrelevant. Well-schooled people are irrelevant. They can sell film and razor blades, push paper and talk on telephones, or sit mindlessly before a flickering computer terminal, but as human beings they are useless. Useless to others and useless to themselves. (Dumbing us Down, John Taylor Gatto)

- The record of the development of compulsory education is a record of State usurpation of parental control over children on behalf of its own; an imposition of uniformity and equality to repress individual growth; and the development of techniques to hinder the growth of reasoning power and independent thought among the children. (Education: Free and Compulsory, Murray Rothbard)

The History of Compulsory Schooling

Martin Luther, The Reformation, and Compulsory Schooling

Martin Luther is thought of as marking the birth of the modern compulsory schooling system. Below are some passages from Murray Rothbard's book Education: Free and Compulsory, describing Luther's influence on the schooling system pervasive in the West today:

- **The first modern movement for compulsory state education stemmed directly from the Reformation. A prime force was Martin Luther. Luther repeatedly called for communities to establish public schools and to make attendance in them compulsory.** In his famous letter to the German rulers in 1524, Luther used Statist premises to reach Statist conclusions: Dear rulers ... I maintain that the civil authorities are under obligation to compel the people to send their children to school.... If the government can compel such citizens as are fit for military service to bear spear and rifle, to mount ramparts, and perform other martial duties in time of war, how much more has it a right to compel the people to send their children to school, because in this case we are warring with the devil, whose object it is secretly to exhaust our cities and principalities of their strong men. Education Free and Compulsory, Murray Rothbard)

- The Lutheran influence on the political and educational life of the West, and particularly Germany, has been enormous. **He was the first advocate of compulsory schooling, and his plans were the pattern for the first German schools. Furthermore, he inculcated Lutherans with the ideals of obedience to the State and persecution of all dissenters. As Acton states, he "impressed on his party that character of political dependence, and that habit of passive obedience to the State, which it has ever since retained."** A succinct estimate of Luther's influence on politics and compulsory education by an admirer follows: The permanent and positive value of Luther's pronouncement of 1524 lies not so much in its direct effects as in the hallowed associations which it established for Protestant Germany between the national religion and the educational duties of the individual and the state. Thus, doubtless, was created that healthy public opinion which rendered the principle of compulsory school attendance easy of acceptance in Prussia at a much later date than in England. Education Free and Compulsory, Murray Rothbard)

Prussia and the Development of Factory Model Schooling

Prussia, under Frederick William I, developed what is today known as the factory model of schooling. Such an institution was important in cultivating an obedient population required for military service:

- The state of Prussia began to rise in power and dominance at the beginning of the eighteenth century led by its first king, Frederick William I. Frederick William believed fervently in paternal despotism, and in the virtues of monarchical absolutism. One of his first measures was to effect a huge increase in the Prussian army, founded on an iron discipline which became famous throughout Europe. In civil administration, King Frederick William forged the centralizing engine of the Civil Service, which grew into the famous autocratic Prussian bureaucracy. In the commercial world, the

King imposed restrictions, regulations, and subsidies on trade and business. (Education: Free and Compulsory, Murray Rothbard)

- **It was King Frederick William I who inaugurated the Prussian compulsory school system, the first national system in Europe.** In 1717, he ordered compulsory attendance of all children at the state schools, and, in later acts, he followed with the provision for the construction of more such schools. (Education: Free and Compulsory, Murray Rothbard)

- It is hardly coincidence that the most notoriously despotic State in Europe-Prussia-was the first to have a national system of compulsory education, nor that the original inspiration, as we have seen, was Luther and his doctrine of obedience to State absolutism. As Mr. Twentyman put it: **"State interference in education was almost coincident with the rise of the Prussian state."** (Education: Free and Compulsory, Murray Rothbard)

Prussia and the Development of Compulsory Factory Model of Schooling in the United States

Educational reformers in the United States brought the factory model of schooling developed in Prussia into the United States in the 19th century. This schooling model continues to be the dominant educational institution in the West today. Below are some passages which reveal its development in the United States and its nefarious nature:

- **…this despotic Prussian system formed an inspiring model for the leading professional educationists in the United States, who ruled the public school systems here and were largely responsible for its extension.** For example, Calvin E. Stowe, one of the prominent American educators of the day, wrote a report on the Prussian system and praised it as worthy of imitation here. Stowe lauded Prussia; although under the

absolute monarchy of Frederick William III, it was the "best-educated" country in the world. Not only were there public schools in the elementary and higher grades, for pre-university and pre-business students, but also 1,700 teachers' seminaries for the training of future state teachers. (Education: Free and Compulsory, Murray Rothbard)

- **America, for example, began, for the most part, with a system of either completely private or with philanthropic schools.** Then, in the nineteenth century, the concept of public education changed subtly, until everybody was urged to go to the public school, and private schools were accused of being divisive. Finally, the State imposed compulsory education on the people, either forcing children to go to public schools or else setting up arbitrary standards for private schools. Parental instruction was frowned on. Thus, the State has been warring with parents for control over their children. (Education: Free and Compulsory, Murray Rothbard)

- But what shocks is that we should so eagerly have adopted one of the very worst aspects of Prussian culture: **an educational system deliberately designed to produce mediocre intellects, to hamstring the inner life, to deny students appreciable leadership skills, and to ensure docile 'and incomplete citizens - all in order to render the populace "manageable:'** (Weapons of Mass Instruction, John Taylor Gatto)

- Cubberley was dean of Stanford's influential School of Education as well, a friendly correspondent of Conant at Harvard. He had written in his book *Public School Administration* (1922) that **"Our schools are ... factories in which the raw products (children) are to be shaped and fashioned ..." And that it is the business of the school to build its pupils according to the specifications laid down.** (Weapons of Mass Instruction, John Taylor Gatto)

- …an executive director of the National Education Association announced the NEA expected **"to accomplish by education what dictators in Europe are seeking to do by compulsion and force:'** That's straightforward enough, isn't it? (Dumbing us Down, John Taylor Gatto)

- **The great purpose of school [self-alienation] can be realized better in dark, airless, ugly places**....It is to master the physical self, to transcend the beauty of nature. School should develop the power to withdraw from the external world. (The Philosophy of Education*,* William Torrey Harris, United States Commissioner of Education)

- "Ninety-nine [students] out of a hundred are automata, careful to walk in prescribed paths, careful to follow the prescribed custom. This is not an accident but t**he result of substantial education which, scientifically defined, is the subsumption of the individual."** (The Philosophy of Education, William Torrey Harris, United States Commissioner of Education)

State-Controlled Compulsory Schooling

Below are some passages which question the idea that the State has the right to institute compulsory schooling on all children, and furthermore, that state-sponsored mandatory schooling coincides with a increasing uniform population as well as the development of authoritarian governments.

- "The most dangerous man to any government is the man who is able to think things out for himself, without regard to the prevailing superstitions and taboos. Almost inevitably he comes to the conclusion that the government he lives under is dishonest, insane, and intolerable..." (H.L. Mencken)

- Furthermore, it is inevitable that the State would impose uniformity on the teaching of charges. Not only is uniformity more congenial to the bureaucratic temper and easier to enforce; this would be almost inevitable where collectivism has supplanted individualism. With collective State ownership of the children replacing individual ownership and rights, it is clear that the collective principle would be enforced in teaching as well. **Above all, what would be taught is the doctrine of obedience to the State itself. For tyranny is not really congenial to the spirit of man, who requires freedom for his full development. Therefore, techniques of inculcating reverence for despotism and other types of "thought control" are bound to emerge. Instead of spontaneity, diversity, and independent men, there would emerge a race of passive, sheep-like followers of the State. Since they would be only incompletely developed, they would be only half-alive.** (Education: Free and Compulsory, Murray Rothbard)

- **At the base of totalitarianism and compulsory education is the idea that children belong to the State rather than to their parents.** One of the leading promoters of that idea in Europe was the famous Marquis de Sade, who insisted that children are the property of the State. There is no need to dwell on education in Communist countries. Communist countries impose compulsory state schooling, and enforce rigid indoctrination of obedience to the rulers. The compulsory schooling is supplemented by State monopolies on other propaganda and educational fields. (Education: Free and Compulsory, Murray Rothbard)

- **We shall see that since the State began to control education, its evident tendency has been more and more to act in such a manner as to promote repression and hindrance of education, rather than the true development of the individual. Its tendency has been for compulsion, for enforced equality at the lowest level,** for the watering

down of the subject and even the abandonment of all formal teaching, for the inculcation of obedience to the State and to the "group," rather than the development of self-independence, for the deprecation of intellectual subjects. And finally, it is the drive of the State and its minions for power that explains the "modern education" creed of "education of the whole child" and making the school a "slice of life," where the individual plays, adjusts to the group, etc. The effect of this, as well as all the other measures, is to repress any tendency for the development of reasoning powers and individual independence; to try to usurp in various ways the "educational" function (apart from formal instruction) of the home and friends, and to try to mold the "whole child" in the desired paths. Thus, "modern education" has abandoned the school functions of formal instruction in favor of molding the total personality both to enforce equality of learning at the level of the least educable, and to usurp the general educational role of home and other influences as much as possible. (Education: Free and Compulsory, Murray Rothbard)

- Educational texts are necessarily selective, in subject matter, language, and point of view. Where teaching is conducted by private schools, there will be a considerable variation in different schools; the parents must judge what they want their children taught, by the curriculum offered. Then each must strive for objective truth.... Nowhere will there be any inducement to teach the "supremacy of the state" as a compulsory philosophy. But every politically controlled educational system will inculcate the doctrine of state supremacy sooner or later, whether as the divine right of kings, or the "will of the people" in "democracy." Once that doctrine has been accepted, it becomes an almost superhuman task to break the stranglehold of the political power over the life of the citizen. It has had his body, property, and mind in its clutches from infancy. An octopus would sooner release its prey. **A tax-supported, compulsory educational system is the complete model of the totalitarian state.** (Isabel Paterson)

- For what is meant by saying that a government ought to educate the people? Why should they be educated? What is the education for? Clearly, to fit the people for social life-to make them good citizens. And who is to say what are good citizens? The government: there is no other judge. And who is to say how these good citizens may be made? The government: there is no other judge. . Hence the proposition is convertible into this-a government ought to mold children into good citizens.... It must first form for itself a definite conception of a pattern citizen; and, having done this, must elaborate such system of discipline as seems best calculated to produce citizens after that pattern. This system of discipline it is bound to enforce to the uttermost. For if it does otherwise, it allows men to become different from what in its judgment they should become, and therefore fails in that duty it is charged to fulfill. (Herbert Spencer)

Should the Parent or the State Oversee the Education of the Child?

In modern society we assume it is normal for the government to take children for approximately 15 of their most formative years, and oversee their development. Below are some passages which hint at the idea that not only is this immoral, but dangerous:

- **The key issue in the entire discussion is simply this: shall the parent or the State be the overseer of the child?** An essential feature of human life is that, for many years, the child is relatively helpless, that his powers of providing for himself mature late. Until these powers are fully developed he cannot act completely for himself as a responsible individual. He must be under tutelage. This tutelage is a complex and difficult task. From an infancy of complete dependence and subjection to adults, the child must

grow up gradually to the status of an independent adult. **The question is under whose guidance, and virtual "ownership" the child should be: his parents' or the State's? There is no third, or middle, ground in this issue. Some party must control, and no one suggests that some individual third party have authority to seize the child and rear it.** (Education: Free and Compulsory, Murray Rothbard)

- **It is obvious that the natural state of affairs is for the parents to have charge of the child. The parents are the literal producers of the child, and the child is in the most intimate relationship to them that any people can be to one another.** The parents have ties of family affection to the child. The parents are interested in the child as an individual, and are the most likely to be interested and familiar with his requirements and personality. Finally, if one believes at all in a free society, where each one owns himself and his own products, it is obvious that his own child, one of his most precious products, also comes under his charge. (Education: Free and Compulsory, Murray Rothbard)

- **The only logical alternative to parental "ownership" of the child is for the State to seize the infant from the parents and to rear it completely itself. To any believer in freedom this must seem a monstrous step indeed.** In the first place, the rights of the parents are completely violated, their own loving product seized from them to be subjected to the will of strangers. In the second place, the rights of the child are violated, for he grows up in subjection to the unloving hands of the State, with little regard for his individual personality. Furthermore-and this is a most important consideration- for each person to be "educated," to develop his faculties to the fullest, he needs freedom for this development. We have seen above that freedom from violence is essential to the development of a man's reason and personality. But the State! The State's very being rests on violence, on compulsion- **As a-matter of fact, the very feature that**

distinguishes the State from other individuals and groups is that the State has the only (legal) power to use violence. In contrast to all other individuals and organizations, the State issues decrees which must be obeyed at the risk of suffering prison or the electric chair. **The child would have to grow up under the wings of an institution resting on violence and restriction. What sort of peaceful development could take place under such auspices?** (Education: Free and Compulsory, Murray Rothbard)

Diversity of Individuals and the Uniform-Producing Tendency of State-Sponsored Schooling

Below are some passages which explain why diversity and the cultivation of individuality is essential not only for the well-being of the individual, but for social prosperity; and that state-sponsored schooling hinders the cultivation of diversity in favor of producing a uniform conformist population.

The Importance of Diversity among Individuals

- **It is evident that the common enthusiasm for equality is, in the fundamental sense, anti-human. It tends to repress the flowering of individual personality and diversity, and civilization itself; it is a drive toward savage uniformity.** Since abilities and interests are naturally diverse, a drive toward making people equal in all or most respects is necessarily a leveling downward. It is a drive against development of talent, genius, variety, and reasoning power. Since it negates the very principles of human life and human growth, the creed of equality and uniformity is a creed of death and destruction. (Education: Free and Compulsory, Murray Rothbard)

- One of the most important facts about human nature is the great diversity among individuals. Of course, there are certain broad characteristics, physical and mental, which are common to all human beings But more than any other species, individual men are distinct and separate individuals. **Not only is each fingerprint unique, each personality is unique as well. Each person is unique in his tastes, interests, abilities, and chosen activities.** Animal activities, routine and guided by instinct, tend to be uniform and alike. But human individuals, despite similarities in ends and values, despite mutual influences, tend to express the unique imprint of the individual's own personality. **The development of individual variety tends to be both the cause and the effect of the progress of civilization. As civilization progresses, there is more opportunity for the development of a person's reasoning and tastes in a growing variety of fields.** (Education: Free and Compulsory, Murray Rothbard)

- The State's imposition of uniform standards does grave violation to the diversity of human tastes and abilities. (Education: Free and Compulsory, Murray Rothbard)

- Mankind is naturally differentiated into many types, and to press all these types into the same mold must inevitably lead to distortions and repressions. Schools should be of many kinds, following different methods and catering for different dispositions. It might be argued that even a totalitarian state must recognize this principle but the truth is that differentiation is an organic process, the spontaneous and roving associations of individuals for particular purposes. To divide and segregate is not the same as to join and aggregate. It is just the opposite process. The whole structure of education as the natural process we have

envisaged, falls to pieces if we attempt to make that structure ... artificial. (Herbert Read)

Self-Education

While most of us in the West have been subjected to the detrimental effects of state-sponsored compulsory schooling, the fact is that education is a life-long process. We can therefore spend our adult years educating ourselves out of the indoctrination we were subjected to as children.

- In a fundamental sense, as a matter of fact, everyone is "self-educated." A person's environment, physical or social, does not "determine" the ideas and knowledge with which he will emerge as an adult. It is a fundamental fact of human nature that a person's ideas are formed for himself; others may influence them, but none can determine absolutely the ideas and values which the individual will adopt or maintain through life. (Education: Free and Compulsory, Murray Rothbard)

- **Discovering meaning for yourself as well as discovering satisfying purpose for yourself, is a big part of what education is.** How this can be done by locking children away from the world is beyond me. (Dumbing us Down, John Taylor Gatto)

- This entire process of growing up, of developing all the facets of a man's personality, is his education. It is obvious that a person acquires his education in all activities of his childhood; all his waking hours are spent in learning in one form or another. It is clearly absurd to limit the term "education" to a person's formal schooling. He is learning all the time. He learns and forms ideas about other people, their desires, and actions to achieve them, the world and the natural laws that govern it; and his own ends, and how to achieve them. He formulates ideas on the nature of man,

and what his own and others' ends should be in light of this nature. This is a continual process, and it is obvious that formal schooling constitutes only an item in this process. (Education: Free and Compulsory, Murray Rothbard)

- Whatever an education is, it should make you a unique individual, not a conformist; it should furnish you with an original spirit with which to tackle the big challenges; it should allow you to find values which will be your road map through life; it should make you spiritually rich, a person who loves whatever you are doing, wherever you are, whomever you are with; it should teach you what is important: how to live and how to die. **What's gotten in the way of education in the United States is a theory of social engineering that says there is one right way to proceed with growing up. That's an ancient Egyptian idea symbolized by the pyramid with an eye on top, the one that's on the other side of George Washington on our one-dollar bill. Everyone is a stone defined by its position on the pyramid. This theory has been presented in many different ways, but at bottom it signals the worldview of minds obsessed with the control of other minds, obsessed by dominance and strategies of intervention to maintain that dominance.** (Dumbing us Down, John Taylor Gatto)

- Right now we are taking from our children all the time that they need to develop self-knowledge. That has to stop. We have to invent school experiences that give a lot of that time back. We need to trust children from a very early age with independent study, perhaps arranged in school, but which takes place away from the institutional setting. We need to invent curricula where each kid has a chance to develop private uniqueness and self-reliance. (Dumbing us Down, John Taylor Gatto)

Concluding Passages

- No road for the people will ever be open unless the government completely gives up control over us or any aspect of our lives. It has led the country into an abyss and it does not know the way out. (Alexander Solzhenitsyn)

- The rigid stupidities of forced schooling, its linear logics, its bell curves, its buzzers and tests and multiple humiliations, its resort to magical spells, fills me with rage these days as an old man. Real education can only begin out of a foundation of self-awareness. Know the truth of yourself or you are nothing but a **pathetic human resource**. Your life will have missed it's point. (Dumbing us Down, John Taylor Gatto)

- After a long life, and thirty years in the public school trenches, **I've concluded that genius is as common as dirt. We suppress genius because we haven't yet figured out how to manage a population of educated men and women. The solution, I think, is simple and glorious. Let them manage themselves.** (Dumbing us Down, John Taylor Gatto)