

# Separation of Politics and School

by Lazarus Long

## Introduction:

As school funding has increased, the value per dollar spent has not. It has, in fact, fallen to the point where we now have high school graduates that must take remedial English courses as a mandatory first-term community college course.

These students, many of them with OAC certificates, enter community college unable to compose a grammatically correct sentence. The colleges are forced to spend scarce dollars on remedial English courses. It is frightening to see a classroom full of 18 and 19 year-old students, struggling with verb tenses and spelling problems involving the same word lists that my son was coping with at the age of ten. This problem is not unique to Ontario or even Canada, but is also a significant problem in the United States.

*"And let's face it, public schools are also on the skids academically. Certainly, bleak SAT scores and dropout rates prove this. Just ask any employer or college-level instructor, and you will hear that young adults are not only lacking in basic skills but in basic manners."*[1]

But why is that? Both Canada and the United States annually spend billions on education and at a higher proportional rate when compared to the GDP, than they did 40 years ago.

*"Accompanying the decline in the quality of public education has been a dramatic increase in the cost of public education. Since World War II, real spending per public school student has increased 40 percent each decade, and has gone from about \$1,000 per student in 1945 to over \$5,000 per student in 1990 measured in constant dollars."*[2]

Yet forty years ago, a high school graduate was fluent, not only in oral English, but was able to communicate in written English at a high level of quality. Since I have not read of any studies that would indicate that our capacity for learning is devolving, I would conclude that the causal factors toward this trend of illiteracy lies within the system.

## The Educational System Structure and it's Politicization:

Our school system, funded through taxation and administered by a large bureaucracy has much to do with why students are poorly served by the schools. For as in any government funded bureaucracy, politics plays a major role not only in what and how subjects are taught but in the philosophy that underlies the mechanics of teaching.

*"Every politically controlled educational system will inculcate the doctrine of state supremacy sooner or later... 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."*[2]

Students are taught that they have entitlements and that those entitlements include the right to post-secondary education. Teachers are pressured to not fail students because it is harmful for a child to experience failure. This is now established dogma in the system and the children pay for it.

*"Everyone should go to college. This assumed: (2) Everyone is \*suited\* for college. It was only a small step to: (3) Everyone is \*entitled\* to go to college - at public (i.e., taxpayer) expense if necessary. As egalitarianism more and more became the dominant \*ethos\* among intellectuals, these three premises were supplemented by a fourth: (4) Everyone is \*equally\* suited for college and capable of succeeding there. Thus if some did not succeed in college, it was the instructor's fault, the school's fault, or the educational system's fault for being elitist, undemocratic, or discriminatory."*[3]

This leads to students being pushed through the system without regards as to whether or not they have absorbed any knowledge or skills on the way through.

Other beliefs have also become part of the public school dogma. As Stephen Yates argues in his essay, "The Morrill Act: The Suicide of Higher Education":

*"Hordes of students are then admitted to public universities regardless of their ability to do college level work (which is sometimes negligible). Often they are admitted for blatantly political reasons. Increasing the /diversity/ of student bodies became a major priority of college and university admissions, often to comply with court orders."*[3]

The Royal Commission on Learning in Ontario has this to say about cultural diversity in the schools:

*"31. That COFAM/OTAB immediately define and set aside, for short- and medium-term adult literacy programs, a francophone allotment that is not linked to participation in the workforce, in addition to the francophone programs linked to workforce status and intention.*

*140. That the Ministry and school boards systematically review and monitor teaching materials of all types (texts, reading materials, videos, software, etc.), as well as teaching practices, educational programs (curriculum), and assessment tools to ensure that they are free of racism and meet the spirit and letter of anti-racism policies;*

*141. That in jurisdictions with large numbers of black students, school boards, academic authorities, faculties of education, and representatives of the black community collaborate to establish demonstration schools and innovative programs based on best practices in bringing about academic success for black students;*

*142. That whenever there are indications of collective under-achievement in any particular group of students, school boards ensure that teachers and principals have the necessary strategies and human and financial resources to help these students improve."*[4]

All these recommendations place pressure on the teachers to ensure that students of identified minority groups not only pass their courses but achieve a equitable distribution of marks comparable to the overall average.

In short, the teachers are faced with setting different standards for students that may genuinely not be capable of working at a certain level, or else facing accusations that they or the school system is discriminating against a member of an officially identified minority group.

Our multicultural agenda that has been imposed by the interventionists of the liberal left has resulted in a climate of discrimination chill.

*"Then there's the politically volatile issue of cultural curricula in politicized public schools. Now, instead of learning the broad themes of assimilation and cosmopolitan tolerance, children are subject to politicized multicultural sloganeering--while being used all too many times as cannon fodder in the continuous power grab of teachers' unions."*[1]

This socialist, interventionist thrust has the endorsement of both the bureaucracy and the teacher's unions, the two biggest power blocs in the education system.

Another disturbing feature of the linkage between government agencies and the school system, is the increased number of children that are identified as requiring special needs service. No student is regarded as lazy, although I would suspect that in some cases that is true. Any student who has the slightest difficulty is identified as requiring intervention. Of course this leads to more agencies and bureaucratic decisions being made about the child. Rarely is the school setting considered as being a problem. The methodology seems to be, examine home life to see if intervention is required, examine child for physical, mental or emotional problems, re-examine home if any problems are found.

## **The Role of the Unions in Socialist Value Oriented Education:**

The unions that represent the teachers have a strong interest in seeing continued growth of the education system from it's original purpose of providing literacy and developing of learning skills to it's modern day role as a social engineering machine.

Traditionally politically active, the teachers' unions have a strong socialist bent to them that makes them resistant to any lessening of power. They are, in a sense acting in self-interest to protect as many jobs as they can and to make the case for further hiring. However, they also rigidly oppose any movement toward choice or competition for education dollars.

The Statist mentality of the bureaucracy and the unions was illustrated

nicely during the term of Premier Bob Rae of the New Democratic Party. The NDP in September 1990, to widespread enthusiastic support from the unions, issued a statement called "The NDP Philosophy of Elementary and Secondary Education". It called for an education system that "\*guaranteed the students an equality of outcome\*". It also stated as a goal "\*learning as a cooperative experience rather than a competitive one.\*"[5]

The State-run Education System as a Social Engineering tool:

The Education System has as it's objective, not only the original goal of developing literacy and learning skills, but also to mold the values of the students in the system.

*"But we remain convinced that every school must promote the development of basic moral values, such as a sense of caring and compassion, respect for the human person and anti-racism, a commitment to peace and non-violence, honesty, and justice."*[4]

Noble sounding, it requires a closer examination. Those values are taught, not as ones that students should be responsible to uphold, but rather as ones that the students are entitled to have the state protect and enforce. The student is taught the desirability of having government agencies and legislation ensure that those moral values are enforced.

That morality cannot be legislated is not mentioned. Students are continually bombarded with the message that group think and cooperation is far better than competition and the child who prefers to work independently is targeted for investigation for possible problems. All this brings to mind the plaque displayed in one of the homes in John Wyndham's "The Chrysalids". That plaque set the tone for the novel and would not seem out of place hanging by the blackboard in today's classrooms. The message..."Keepeth the Norm".

The State also sees as a role for the Education System as a substitute parent. The Royal Commission on Learning has recommended that Early Childhood Education be made an important part of the education process and that children should be in the system as early as 3 years of age.

*1. That Early Childhood Education (ECE) be provided by all school boards to all children from three to five years of age whose parents/guardians choose to enrol them. ECE would gradually replace existing junior and senior kindergarten programs, and become a part of the public education system;*[4]

That they call for voluntary enrolment is of little consequence. The very nature of the system and the importance placed on egalitarianism would ensure that voluntary would soon be replaced with mandatory, so that all children would be afforded the same opportunity and advantage.

That the system's social engineers have a long term agenda is clear as shown in the following extract from the Royal Commission on Learning.

*"4. That the Ministry of Education and Training develop a guide, suitable for parents, teachers, and other caregivers, outlining stages of learning (and desirable and expectable learner outcomes) from birth onwards, and that it link to the common core curriculum, beginning in Grade 1. This guide, which would include specific*

*learner outcomes at age 6, would be used in developing the curriculum for the Early Childhood Education program."*

The keywords are in the first sentence; desirable and expectable and linked.

## **Solutions:**

Allowing consumer choice by removing the monopoly on funding from the state would allow market forces to act and bring improvements generated by the pursuit of the education dollar.

*"Since public schools have (1) an effective monopoly on education and (2) the government as their source of funding, public education is insulated from competitive market forces. Undisciplined by profit and loss accounting, public schools have no incentive either to operate efficiently or to cater to their customers. In contrast to private firms which are forced to serve the needs of their customers or go out of business, public schools can ignore their customers because they are protected from failing by the deep pockets of the American taxpayers."[2]*

Although the reference is to the American Education system in the above quote, the same applies in Canada. Although supporters of the State School System can point to the numbers of available private schools as proof that there is competition, that is not an accurate statement. Yes, parents are free to choose, but only after they pay the State for the privilege. Whether one uses the public school system or not, the parent pays for it through taxation. Although school boards raise part of their budget through local property taxes, a portion is also paid by the Province out of general revenues (Sales Taxes).

Even in the case of property taxes, you can only decide whether the Public School Board or the Roman Catholic School Board receives your money. If you patronize a private school, church-run school or home school your children, you still must pay to the State their full share. Your costs of educating your child privately come out of what is left after the State extorts its fee for the privilege.

## **Are Vouchers an answer?:**

Voucher systems have been proposed by various groups as a means of funding school systems and allowing parents a choice in where they spend their education dollars. I have problems with vouchers, as they still involve filtering money through a bureaucracy. Better still to leave the money in the hands of the parents in the first place. Vouchers are still a form of wealth re-distribution.

## **Private Schools and Alternatives:**

Those that would argue that ending wealth redistribution would lead to the poor remaining poor without any change at education, can be countered with the fact that private school education need not cost more than public school education. In fact, there are many private schools that have a tuition cost cheaper than that of the public school cost per student.

Many church run schools provide excellent academic standards and throw in a firm grounding in moral behaviour. The values, presuming that the parent would educate his children in a school run by a church of the same denomination as his own religion, would be compatible with the parent's own value system. Shuswap Christian School in Salmon Arm, British Columbia is an excellent example. The school which has it's students evaluated under British Columbia's standardized testing, regularly scores class averages in the 90th percentile. This based on evaluations over a ten year period. I would submit that a standard such as that is adequate schooling. The school cannot in any sense of the word be considered elitist. Tuition is \$800 dollars per year and many of the students that attend are from low income families and include off-reserve Native Americans.

Another alternative could be cooperative schools. Where parents pool their education dollars and design and develop a curriculum. They then, depending on the amount of money on hand, can either hire a teacher to teach their curriculum or they can teach the courses themselves. These are becoming more common as parents seek out others who have the same values and form cooperative associations to educate their children. Often these cooperatives are based on religious or philosophical ideas.

The other alternative, and one that is growing in popularity, is home-schooling. The costs are minimal. I home schooled my children for less than 300 dollars per year on material and school-related outings. The effectiveness depends on the effort the parent puts into it and more importantly, the effort put into the studying by the student. The oft-heard argument that home schooled children are not prepared adequately for post-secondary education is fallacious. I am personally aware of one family who home schooled their two sons. These children never saw the inside of a classroom and many years later, they have completed their first year at McGill University.

## Summary:

"Higher education has not been democratized but *\*mediocritized\**. Egalitarianism tends to have this effect. To make everyone economically equal is to make everyone equally poor. To make them educationally equal is to make them equally illiterate. Egalitarianism is, of course, a sham doctrine no intelligent person can consistently believe or practise; egalitarians themselves would never consider making themselves *\*politically\** equal to non-egalitarians be relinquishing their present supremacy in the universities." [3]

Let's end the mediocritization and allow schools to compete for consumers and let market forces shape the schools. Let's remove the social engineering from schools and allow the teachers to teach and families to instill values. And finally, allow parents to direct their

funds to the schooling method they wish, rather than have the State take it from them and give it back in the form of homogenized, institutionalized pap.

Sources:

- 1 \*At Home, But Hardly Alone\* by Jim Christie(The Freeman)
- 2 \*The Educational Octopus\* by Mark J. Perry(The Freeman)
- 3 \*THE MORRILL ACT AND THE SUICIDE OF HIGHER EDUCATION \*by STEVEN YATES
- 4 \*The Royal Commission on Learning\*(Ontario Government)
- 5 \*The War Against the Family\* by William D. Gairdner, 1992 Stoddart Publishing

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