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The Battle of the Books: The Stakes are High

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He fails to take into account that just as the discoveries by Copernicus brought down the notion of a human-centered universe created by a deity, so the modern traditions of political revolution have invalidated his diety-established unitary form of social organization.

The modern age is essentially different from Illich's preordained classical world in that we approach reality in terms of things not being absolutely pre-established. In the physical sciences Einstein, Whitehead, Planck and others have introduced us to the realization that "novelty" is constantly occurring in the way reality is ordering itself. A similar understanding of social "novelty" is developed through the American and French Revolutions. It is true that the idealized notion of restoration of bygone days was often expressed by the 18th century activist, but Hannah Arendt is correct: "There is no period in history to which the Declaration of the Rights of Man could have harkened back . . . the strange pathos of novelty, so characteristic of the modern age, needed almost two hundred years to leave the relative seclusion of scientific and philosophic thought and to reach the realm of politics."³

In our contemporary understanding of reality the concept of "process" serves as a companion notion with "novelty." Reality flows in a constant process of becoming. "Novelty" is the concept used to designate occurrences in the process which do not conform to our understanding or expectations. We illustrate this point when we speak of mutations being novel occurrences in the evolutionary process of nature. When Illich offers deschooling as an answer to the current plights in society, he is not speaking in terms of a process understanding of reality. Rather, as we have tried to indicate, he postulates from his classical theological position a static view of reality. For Illich there exists an unchanging proper structure only through which can individual and social fulfillment occur, and deschooling is required in order to restore this structure. He does not understand life as a constant process of becoming in which we must continually seek new ways of meeting social problems—ways that emerge from and relate to the current process.

We would suggest that the philosophical understanding of reality in terms of process and novelty provides a more adequate orientation for developing a constructive future society than does Illich's view of a preordained, static social pattern. By realizing that novel events occur in the social process, modern persons are challenged by the realization that in order to be responsible we must continually strive to find more humane ways of organizing our life together.

REFERENCES

1. cf. Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), pp. 1-18.
2. Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 73.
3. Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*. (New York: The Viking Press, 1971), pp. 38-9.

the battle of the books: the stakes are high

FRANKLIN PARKER. *The Battle of the Books: Kanawha County*. Bloomington, Indiana: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation (Fastback#63), 1975. pp. 34. 50 cents.

Here is a booklet as up-to-date as today's newspaper. All across the country school boards are under fire from various groups as well as from the media for a wide variety of reasons ranging from the dismissal of popular administrators to the holding of religious emphasis weeks. This essay deals with such an incident, but one which received national attention from the media because of its far-reaching implications and the social turbulence which accompanied it.

Franklin Parker is Benedum Professor of Education at West Virginia University and the author of numerous other books and articles, especially on African educational development. In this brief study, Parker outlines the events which occurred in conjunction with the widely-reported 1974 confrontation over textbook selection in Kanawha County, West Virginia. He relates the story of what happened, why, and suggests some lessons which can be learned from the incident.

The trouble allegedly began when school board member Alice Moore, wife of a local minister, protested against the adoption of what she considered offensive "anti-American" and "anti-Christian" textbooks. The county, which includes the state capital of Charleston, was subsequently plunged into turmoil by Mrs. Moore's progressive revelation of the content of the books in question. Some of the texts were withdrawn but not all of them. The community polarized over the issue and tempers flared. According to Parker, coal miners, rural people, blue-collar workers, and religious fundamentalists supported Mrs. Moore and her views while professional and white-collar types, urban dwellers, the economically well-to-do, and theologically liberal church people defended the books and the school administration's determination to retain them.

There followed a partially successful school boycott on the part of those parents and students who opposed the "dirty

books" (more were withdrawn), a degree of violence and counter-violence, and even a miner's strike in support of the anti-book forces. Parker found it difficult to unravel the course of events in such an emotionally-charged situation with any degree of certainty. Almost all of the first-hand accounts of what happened are biased. In general, Parker tends to place more credence in the observations of the pro-textbook people, perhaps because of his own professional point of view.

In any case, Parker's essay contains at least three dominant themes. The first is the growing difficulty of maintaining public trust in the schools of America in the face of today's increasingly pluralistic society. That there is a widespread suspicion of professional educators on the part of many segments of the population is amply demonstrated by the textbook war in West Virginia. In the past, the cultural majority imposed its consensus on the schools. Now that there is no national consensus, it becomes a question of which minorities should have their values and lifestyles taught in the public schools? And who is to make these decisions? The professionals? If so, can they be trusted? And if they select multi-cultural and multi-ethnic texts, will they be accepted by members of the former cultural majority; namely, the Anglo-Saxon Protestants?

As Roscoe Keeney, president of the Kanawha County Association of Classroom Teachers, observed: "If the climate between the board, the superintendent, and the public had been healthy and open, this would not have happened or it would have been short-lived." (p. 20) As it was, developments in West Virginia in 1974 showed how wide was the confidence-gap between the local educational establishment and large numbers of its constituency. A sizable and vocal portion of the community expressed its total lack of trust in professional educators in this incident. Likewise, large numbers of people across the nation are no longer willing to give free reign to professional educators in textbook and curriculum selection. As in Kanawha County, they are increasingly troubled about what is being taught their children in the schools.

Second, the textbook controversy in West Virginia raises the question of the fate of public-supported education in the future. In effect, the central issue of the quarrel was: how can a system of tax-supported schools possibly respond to the increasingly disparate needs and demands of so many different ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities? For example, how can the public schools inform students honestly about the nation's history without offending some major interest group in the community? In the West Virginia struggle, PTA president L.W. Seaman actually proposed separate schools for those who wanted their children to use the books and other schools for those who opposed them. (p. 22) Where will all of this end? How can the public schools teach common values when there are no common values? If the schools are re-segregated along cultural, ethnic, and religious lines, who will make the decisions governing this division of the schools?

Third, Parker's essay is marked throughout by a certain professional arrogance on the part of the pro-textbook people and on the part of Parker himself. Thus, the hillbillies and the fundamentalists are essentially benighted folk while the more enlightened elements in the community speak against the protesters and counsel the retention of the books in the name of freedom to learn. In fact, throughout hillbillies, fun-

damentalists, and their champions are painted as ignorant, uneducated, superstitious, misanthropic losers and cranks. (e.g. pp. 5-6, 10, 12-13, 21, 26) On the other hand, the pro-text people are depicted as sophisticated, urbane, humanitarian, and restrained. Here is an example of how the text advocates are treated in Parker's essay: "Insights into the controversy came from Charleston Episcopal minister James Lewis, admired for his moderate views. 'This county is experiencing a religious crusade as fierce as any out of the Middle Ages,' he said. 'Our children are being sacrificed because of the fanatical zeal of our fundamentalist brothers who claim to be hearing the deep, resonant voice of God.'" (p. 24) There are many others. (e.g. pp. 9-10, 11-12, 14, 24-25, 33)

The point here is not to argue that hillbillies and fundamentalists are intellectuals, for most are not. The point is that they have rights too. And correct or not, they should be taken as seriously by professional educators as any other segment of the community. It is as United Mine Workers president Arnold Miller recently said: "I'm a hillbilly, and I'm proud of that." And in attempting to explain to the press why he and his miners were so dissatisfied with the status quo, Miller growled: "But we're not radicals just because we're tired of being sold out and passed by." (*Time*, Nov. 25, 1974, p. 28) The same statement could be made by the hillbillies and fundamentalists about the public schools.

To be fair to Parker, he does recognize in his closing section on "lessons" that: "They [school leaders] need to be informed of the interests of all segments of the community." (p. 32) Also, he draws several other helpful conclusions: (1) school leaders need to find as many ways as possible to facilitate an exchange of views and concerns on a regular basis with as many different groups in the community as possible; (2) it should be recognized that school board members often no longer represent the values of the community at-large but special interests; and, (3) careful planning and consideration of the needs of all parts of the school's constituency will help preclude the impulse for censorship.

However, the fact remains that public education in this country is in serious trouble; that the excruciating problems connected with serving a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, religiously plural society will not go away; and that the despised and exploited subcultures—be they hillbillies, fundamentalists, blacks, or others— will not be appeased by arrogant pontification.

In the case of the textbooks, as Parker so succinctly states: "The battle of the books is a battle for man's destiny." (p.34) And the battle for the schools is a battle for the nation's destiny. In the growing conflict over public education, who will be the casualties (the children?) and who will be the winners (anybody?)? Perhaps a new system of public education needs to be worked out jointly by the professionals, the school leaders, and the people they purport to serve.

This slim volume leaves much to be desired. On the other hand, few will accuse Parker of being dull or non-partisan. If not a profound contribution to the history of education, his booklet at least should serve as a discussion-starter for those concerned with current issues in public education.

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