

The Blumenfeld Education Letter



"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." HOSEA 4:6

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The purpose of this newsletter is to provide knowledge for parents and educators who want to save the children of America from the destructive forces that endanger them. Our children in the public schools are at grave risk in 4 ways: academically, spiritually, morally, and physically — and only a well-informed public will be able to reduce those risks.
"Without vision, the people perish."

Are Compulsory School Attendance Laws Necessary?

It is assumed by the vast majority of Americans that the issue of compulsory school attendance is a settled matter, part and parcel of every civilized nation-state, and a prerequisite of a democratic society. We all acknowledge that a representative form of government requires an educated electorate for its survival.

But what happens when that government's schools no longer know how to teach children to read and write, when those schools turn children not into civilized citizens, but into barbarians? What happens when millions of parents feel compelled to remove their children from government schools in order to make sure that their children do get an education? What happens is that the basic premises of compulsory attendance and government education come into question.

The glaring fact is that despite our compulsory attendance laws, we now have more illiteracy and more ignorance among Americans than before such laws were enacted. The first compulsory school attendance law was passed in Massachusetts in 1852, and by 1918 every state in the Union

had such a law. Yet, the fact is that these laws have merely increased the amount of time children spend in school, not the amount of learning or knowledge they acquire.

The Way It Was

To find out how much better educated Americans were before compulsory attendance laws and government schools existed, all we have to do is read DuPont de Nemours fascinating little book, *National Education in the United States of America*, published in 1812. He writes:

"The United States are more advanced in their educational facilities than most countries.

"They have a large number of primary schools; and as their paternal affection protects children from working in the fields, it is possible to send them to the school-master — a condition which does not prevail in Europe.

"Most young Americans, therefore, can read, write and cipher. Not more than four in a thousand are unable to write legibly — even neatly. . . .

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"England, Holland, the Protestant Cantons of Switzerland more nearly approach the standard of the United States, because in those countries the Bible is read; it is considered a duty to read it to children; and in that form of religion the sermons and liturgy in the language of the people tend to increase and formulate ideas of responsibility. Controversy, also, has developed argumentation and has thus given room for the exercise of logic.

"In America, a great number of people read the Bible, and all the people read a newspaper. The fathers read aloud to their children while breakfast is being prepared — a task which occupies the mothers for three quarters of an hour every morning. And as the newspapers of the United States are filled with all sorts of narratives . . . they disseminate an enormous amount of information."

Obviously, back in the very early days of this republic, education was a family affair closely connected to religious practice. A nation built on Biblical principles had to be a highly literate one. In addition, all of this education was achieved without any government involvement, without any centralized educational bureaucracy, without any professors of education, or accrediting agencies or teacher certification. And, most significantly, without any compulsory attendance laws.

The Way It Is

Contrast that happy picture of complete educational freedom and high literacy with the present situation in which the state has assumed the function of educator, at great expense to the taxpayer, with all sorts of laws and regulations forcing the population to patronize a system that is turning out functional illiterates by the millions.

According to an article in the Spring 1989 issue of *Education Canada*, published by the Canadian Education Association:

"It is currently estimated that one million Canadians are almost totally illiterate and another four million are termed 'functionally illiterate.' In the United States these figures are estimated respectively at 26 million and 60 million."

Both Canada and the United States have had compulsory attendance laws for decades. The purpose of these laws was to insure that every child was educated. The laws were particularly aimed at the children of the poor, and yet it is they who have suffered the most at the hands of government education.

Even the Secretary of Education has admitted in the frankest terms that the government education system is failing the American people so miserably that it threatens our very future as a nation. On May 3, 1989, Secretary Cavazos, in his sixth annual report card on American schools, repeated the well-known litany of failures that plague U.S. education: declining SAT scores, declining interest in math and science, declining literacy and a soaring dropout rate of 44.5% in Washington, D.C. He said that we were still wallowing in a "tide of mediocrity," and that "we must do better or perish as the nation we know today."

Serving the Establishment

Obviously, then, the purpose of compulsory attendance is not to provide an education for all, but merely to fill classrooms with children for the convenience of the education establishment whose financial benefits depend on deluding the public into believing that education is taking place. But Dr. Cavazos knows that it isn't.

In other words, compulsory attendance

forces parents, particularly poor parents, to patronize schools that are incompetent and harmful to their children. The fact that millions of young Americans have emerged from the educational process, unable to read, write or spell, do simple arithmetic, or speak grammatically, means that attending school has been a complete waste of time and money. They have acquired no employable skills and now make up the burgeoning underclass in our inner cities who are turning to drugs and crime, thereby making life in many of our big cities dangerous and intolerable.

The sorry fact is that in America's public schools, the educators pretend to teach and the pupils pretend to learn.

The Original Premise

How could compulsory school attendance have produced such disastrous results? The answer is to be found in the premise of the original idea. That idea was first expressed among the New England Unitarians who, in the early 19th century, were in the forefront of the movement for government owned and controlled schools. The Unitarians had decided to replace salvation through Christ with salvation through secular education.

The Unitarians no longer believed in the divinity of Christ or in the doctrine of original sin. They believed that evil was caused by poverty, ignorance and social injustice, and that education would rid mankind of ignorance, which would in turn lift the poor out of poverty, which would then eradicate the causes of social injustice.

The Unitarians believed in the basic goodness of human nature and of its perfectibility, and that is why they placed all of their hopes on education — not education run by Calvinists, but secular education run by government.

The Common Schools

Actually, the common schools of New England were established in colonial times by Calvinists who passed laws requiring parents to educate and catechize their children in accordance with Biblical principles. These schools were town schools, supported by the townspeople and run by the clergy. *The idea that there could be education without God was so unbiblical as to be unthinkable.*

As the Unitarians grew in numbers and influence, they set out to remove Calvinist teachings from the common schools by bringing the schools under centralized state control in the late 1830s and advancing the idea that the schools should be Christian but nonsectarian in character. Calvinism was replaced with a watered-down nondenominational Protestantism which virtually all the sects could agree on. Orthodox Calvinists fought against centralization and the watering down of orthodox doctrine. But in the end the liberals prevailed.

During that transition period, truancy was a minor problem. Schools were built to make it possible for all children to be educated. But it wasn't until the arrival of the Irish in large numbers in the 1840s in Boston that the truancy issue was raised and a campaign was started to get a compulsory school attendance law passed.

The Prussian Model

The idea of compulsory school attendance was neither new nor original with the Unitarians. It was already the practice in Prussia where a centralized government school system had been in existence since 1819 and had become the envy of the Unitarians and their liberal Protestant allies who saw in the Prussian system a model they hoped to duplicate in America.

What the Unitarians liked about the Prussian system was its centralized control, its government teacher-training institutions and its strong compulsory attendance laws with its stiff penalties for parents who disobeyed the law. What the liberal Protestants saw in the system was a coercive instrument whereby Irish Catholic children could be forced to attend Protestant — albeit non-denominational — public schools where they could be weaned away from Catholicism.

Both the Unitarians and the liberal Protestants began to view the public schools and compulsory attendance as the most effective means of maintaining the Protestant character of American culture in the face of massive Catholic immigration.

The fact that the Irish were poor and unschooled did not endear them to the proper Bostonians. Charles Fox, master of the Boylston School, said that he was "exceedingly annoyed by a set of miserable, dirty ragged boys, of wretched parents, who generally are about our streets and wharves. . . . The fact is that some parents will not send their children to any school; they want their services to procure chips, to beg, or steal — in fine, to get anything in any way they can. . . . They will not attend school, unless they are deprived of their liberty." (*The Culture Factory* by Stanley K. Schultz, p. 292)

Child Labor

Actually, the major cause of truancy among the immigrants was the need to work and help their families survive in the new world. Child labor was widespread but not as horrendous as later depicted by liberal historians. In fact, for many children, the factory was a very adequate school. Stanley Schultz writes (p. 295):

Harriet Robinson, a Boston girl who started work in the famous Lowell mills at the age of ten, recalled that the greatest hardship was having to be on duty "nearly 14 hours a day. . . . But in every other

respect it was a pleasant life. We were not hurried any more than was for our good, and no more work was required of us than we were able easily to do." She viewed the cotton factory as a good "school" for life for many young people like herself. "For, without this incentive to labor, this chance to earn extra money and to use it in their own way, their influence on the times, and also, to a certain extent, on modern civilization, would certainly have been lost."

The Boston Elite

But the Boston Unitarian elite viewed the situation from their own lofty perspective. Schultz writes (p. 256):

Edmund G. Loring, chairman of the Visiting Committee of the School Committee in 1846, offered that body's opinions that "it is a matter of daily remark, that immigration is constantly countervailing the Puritan leaven of our people, and reducing the scale of public morality and public intelligence." Unless the ignorance, bad manners, and corrupted morals of the foreigners "are corrected by our schools," Loring queried, "what foundation is there for the hope of those who are hopeful of the final fortunes of the country?" The following year, George B. Emerson reported to the Committee that "some provision has been made for the vast accessions to our population by immigration from foreign countries of persons of every age, and of every condition of ignorance." But, Emerson pointed out, much remained to be done about those whom street life educated only to vice and crime. "Unless they are made inmates of our schools," he warned, "many of them will become inmates of our prisons."

Going After the Truant

And so, by way of a compulsory attendance law, the truants would be imprisoned in school rather than in jail! There was no question in the minds of the educators that compulsory attendance meant depriving the truant of his or her freedom in the interest of a higher good defined by the elite.

In 1848, the city marshal of Boston was ordered to find out how many truants and vagrants there were in Boston. He found 1,066 children between the ages of 6 and 16 who were either vagrant or truant. Consid-

ering the fact that in 1849 the total enrollment in Boston's public schools was 20,589, the truants amounted to about 5%. In other words, without compulsory attendance laws, 95% of the city's children were attending school.

Nevertheless, both the politicians and educators were determined to force that 5% into the schools. A compulsory attendance bill was introduced in the state legislature. Several legislators spoke against the bill, arguing that such a law threatened parental rights over their children. To swing public opinion in their favor, the educators launched a propaganda campaign in favor of the law in the press and also at the November 1849 convention of the State Teachers' Association.

First Law Is Passed

On May 3, 1850, the Massachusetts legislature passed a bill authorizing the towns and cities to make any needed provisions for habitual and unemployed truants and to establish penalties for those parents who profited from "their wretched gains or . . . dishonest pursuits."

And in 1852, the Massachusetts legislature passed the first statewide compulsory school attendance law in the U.S. The new law required every child between the ages of 8 and 14 to attend public school for at least 3 months every year; six of those weeks had to be consecutive. Any parents who kept their children out of school were subject to a fine. The law exempted children with mental or physical ill health and children receiving equivalent education by other means.

The Catholics React

It didn't take long for Catholics to figure out that the new law was crafted to force Catholic children into Protestant schools. One

Catholic spokesman expressed his opinion of the common schools without mincing any words. He wrote:

So far as Catholics are concerned, the system of Common Schools in this country is a monstrous engine of injustice and tyranny. Practically, it operates a gigantic scheme for proselytism. By numerous secret appliances, and even sometimes by open or imperfectly disguised machinery, the faith of our children is gradually undermined, and they are trained up to be ashamed of, and to abandon the religion of their fathers. It was bad enough, if this was all done with the money of others; but when it is accomplished, at least in part, *by our own money*, it is really atrocious. It is not to be concealed or denied, that the so-called literature of this country, the taste for which is fostered by our Common Schools, and which is constantly brought to bear on the training of our children, is not of a character to form their tender minds to wholesome moral principles, much less to solid Christian piety. In general, so far as it professes to be *religious*, it is anti-Catholic, and so far as it is secular, it is pagan.

The Catholics then tried to get the authorities to authorize the creation of Catholic public schools for Catholic children. But the authorities argued against such schools on the grounds that if the Catholics were permitted to have their own public schools every other religious sect would demand the same.

In the end, the Catholics realized that their only recourse was to create a private parochial school system of their own, which is what they proceeded to do. The rest is history. State after state passed a compulsory school attendance law in the belief that the Prussian-Massachusetts model was the way to go.

Going After Home-Schoolers

Today the law is not being used to force delinquents and truants into the schools, but to harass and regulate home schoolers and fundamentalist Christian schools. In the 1800s it was assumed that if you attended a public school you learned to read and write. Today, no such assumption can be made. In fact,

public school attendance is now a guarantee for many children that they will not only learn nothing, but that their brains will be destroyed in the process.

Today's public school student is at risk academically, spiritually, morally and physically. To force a child to attend such a school is not only a crime but the worst form of child abuse: menticide — mind murder.

The present-day public school has become the incubator of the functionally illiterate drug user and drug pusher who have made life in our inner cities miserable for millions of Americans and jeopardized our very future as a free and wholesome society.

The compulsory school attendance laws now serve no one but the educators who can use them to further their own monopolistic self interests and cripple the competition.

The Need for Educational Freedom

What America needs now more than ever is a return to educational freedom, so that the American people can apply their ingenuity and unbounded energies to the creation of alternatives to the present debilitating system. Technology has now made compulsory school attendance obsolete. One can now learn much more at home than in any public classroom, at less cost to everyone.

In any case, the public school educators have abdicated their role as teachers. They now call themselves facilitators or change agents. Education has become a racket, not a profession. And the money stakes are high. The organized educators now have the political clout in Washington and the state capitals to get virtually anything they want from a bewildered public which have been told over and over again that the cause of educational failure is not bad teaching and a flawed educational philosophy but lack of financial support.

Fortunately, many voters are not buying that lie, which accounts for the rejection of so many school bond issues in local communities. The public seems to have had enough, but it is getting mixed and confusing signals from its political leaders and representatives. Spineless legislators quiver like Jello whenever a leader of the education establishment or its powerful union breathes down their necks. And so, those who are truly interested in education have the double task of exposing the education racket for what it is, and informing the public and their fearless elected representatives of what is actually going on in public education.

Repeal Should Be the Goal

The goal of home-schoolers, Christian educators, libertarians, and conservatives in general should be the repeal of all compulsory school attendance laws, which have become the most powerful weapons the education establishment can use to thwart the competition and force parents to do the educators' will.

These laws not only violate the parents' unalienable right to determine how their children are to be educated, but they violate the 13th Amendment which prohibits involuntary servitude. No child should be forced to serve the interests of the education establishment. No child should be forced to undergo brainwashing and indoctrination by a self-serving monopoly of facilitators and change agents.

The compulsory school attendance laws came into being before the adoption of the 13th Amendment, which states:

"Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

"Congress shall have power to enforce

this article by appropriate legislation."

Involuntary Servitude

Certainly compulsory school attendance — no matter for what worthy cause — is a form of "involuntary servitude," which is strictly prohibited by the U.S. Constitution. Note that the 13th Amendment prohibits both slavery *and* involuntary servitude, and we believe that the law applies to children as well as to adults.

Today, millions of children are forced to serve the interests of the education establishment, getting little in return by way of education, often being permanently crippled intellectually by widespread educational malpractice.

When will some honest Christian lawyers challenge the state on this crucial issue? When will home-schoolers organize a concerted, long-range effort to repeal the compulsory school attendance laws or have them declared unconstitutional?

True religious, academic and economic freedom will never be restored in this country until educational freedom is regained. The nature of a society is determined by the way its children are educated. The present atheistic, immoral education monopoly is leading us toward totalitarianism — the total state that owns its people. The growing conservative movement, the Christian revival, and the trend toward privatization all indicate that more and more Americans are rejecting the kind of statist future the educators want for us. The educators don't call it totalitarianism. They usually call it utopia, egalitarianism, or world government. But what it all adds up to is the end of the America created by our Founding Fathers, the America that countless young Americans have fought and died for, the America we want to bequeath to our children and our children's children.

Pulling the Linchpin

The compulsory attendance laws are the linchpin of the whole totalitarian plan. Such laws have been used by every modern dictator and tyrannical government to control their people and mold the minds of the children. Such laws are not only not needed in a free society, but ultimately lead to its demise.

Let us launch a drive to pull that linchpin and unravel the whole convoluted web of statist control and regulation that is strangling individual and religious freedom. Only when Americans get themselves solidly back on the road to freedom will their optimism and hope prosper.

Education Costs Reach New High

Education Secretary Lauro Cavazos said Americans will invest a record \$384 billion in education this year.

Cavazos released the Department of Education's annual "back-to-school" statistical forecast for the 1990-91 school year and noted the spending projection is a 6.9 percent jump from last year's estimate of \$359 billion. The total includes local, state and federal expenditures, as well as dollars from private sources.

The report said elementary and secondary schools will have the largest spending increase, 7.2 percent over last year from \$216 billion to \$231 billion. Adjusting for inflation this is a 34 percent increase since 1980-81. (San Francisco Chronicle, 8/23/90)

A Sad Farewell to "Johnny" Johnson

Word has reached us of the untimely death of our friend, W.A. "Johnny" Johnson, publisher of the Daily News Digest, and head of Research Publications, in Phoenix,

Arizona, August 29, 1990, at age 57.

Johnny, as he was affectionately called, was instrumental in helping The Paradigm Company get off the ground with the publication of *NEA: Trojan Horse in American Education*. Research Publications helped in everything, from getting the book designed to its distribution to the reader. Johnny also impressed us with the need for a newsletter on education written from the conservative perspective. And so the *Blumenfeld Education Letter* was born, planned and designed right there in his office.

Johnny, who was both a gentleman and a scholar, contributed greatly to the dissemination of conservative ideas through the alternative medium of the newsletter. He was a man of vision, totally devoted to the cause of individual freedom and American independence. He embodied everything we admire in the American character: enterprising, patriotic, independent, unstinting in his pursuit of truth. He will be sorely missed.

**Parents for Unalienable Rights
In Education (PURE)
3rd Annual Conference
Oct. 19-20, 1990 Boise, Idaho**

**"A Parents' Rights Strategy
for the Nineties"**

It's time for parents to start organizing a long-range campaign to repeal compulsory school attendance laws. Only by going on the offensive will parents be able to defend their rights to educate their children without interference from state bureaucrats and government educators. Only by repealing compulsory school attendance will educational freedom be restored in America.

Speakers will include Samuel L. Blumen-

feld, Sharon Pangelinan, Bob Forrey, David Gamble and David Barrett.

The conference will be held at the Broadway Ave. Baptist Church, 2530 Broadway Ave., Boise, Idaho 83706. For information call The Montgomery Institute (208) 888-2315 or The Blumenfeld Education Letter (208) 322-4440.

**Illiteracy Snarls Hurricane
Relief in South Carolina**

Rampant illiteracy has been a major obstacle in getting disaster relief to Hurricane Hugo victims in South Carolina, federal disaster workers say.

"In 18 years of disaster relief work, including Puerto Rico and Micronesia in the Pacific, I have never seen as many Xs signed on applications," said Mike Polny, individual assistance director for the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Agency officials say illiteracy-related complications in filling out applications, coupled with the widespread rural destruction caused by the storm, have forced them to extend relief work by more than two months.

"We have conducted surveys and knocked on hundreds of doors to find out why people are coming in so slow for help," said FEMA spokesman Frank Mosco. "It keeps coming back to people being out of the mainstream; it boils down to an illiteracy problem."

Because so many of those in need of assistance were not getting the message through the media and not able to understand the instructions they received, FEMA launched the most extensive outreach program it has ever conducted after a disaster, Mosco said.

(Undated clipping sent to us from South Carolina by John T. Harllee)