

## Is Public Education Necessary?

AS EDMUND OPITZ has said, where we once had public (State-connected) churches and private schools, the situation is now completely reversed. Whether the public schools are engaged in imposing a new faith, that of secular humanism, on an unsuspecting populace is a matter of much discussion. Such an imposition is surely happening in some places. But families and churches will combat it. The greater danger in public education is that State-supported schools must fail to give anti-Statist philosophies (in economics and political science) an even break. Who, in a public school, would recommend Hilaire Belloc's *The Servile State* as alternative reading in a course? I wouldn't hope for anything better than a clash of opinion about Statism in a public school class, but I'm still waiting to see it.

Leonard Read once said that the struggle to separate school and State should be high on the libertarian agenda of the future. The recent upsurge in private schools is an indication the battle is already on. But declining scores on Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SAT) have had more to do with the change than any increase in philosophical understanding. We have been waiting for a long time for a book that would correctly assess the totalitarian potential in a universal "free" (i.e., tax-supported) public school system that relies on compulsion to recruit its students. But now the book is here.

Samuel L. Blumenfeld, the author of a previous book called *How to Start Your Own Private School—and Why You Need One*, has gone back deeply into history to write the story of the "Prussianizing" of American

His new book has a sharp title—*Is Public Education Necessary?* (Devin-Adair, P. O. Drawer A, Old Greenwich, Conn. 06870, \$12.95). The big point that he makes is that the public school system was fastened upon us by a band of fanatics who were primarily concerned with imposing their elitist power on a public that had already achieved almost universal literacy by patronizing the private academies of the time.

Almost from the beginning America had some tax-supported public schools. The Boston Calvinists believed in a back-stopping arrangement that would give indigent students a chance at making their public Boston Latin School, which offered the classical training necessary to entering Harvard. But private academies were the general rule in most of the states in the early nineteenth-century years.

Literacy levels were higher then than they are now. The general system was peculiarly American. In Pennsylvania, for example, the law provided for tuition grants to help poor children enter the private academies. But most people paid for their own education. This would have become the "American way" if it hadn't been for the Boston meddlers who were breaking from their historic Calvinism to proclaim that human nature was perfectible and that

it was the business of the State to train the young mind in the ways of perfectibility.

Harvard University became the forcing house of the new anti-original-sin doctrine when it was taken over by the Unitarians in 1805. The Unitarians were not averse to using the State to combat Calvinist influence. They sent their promising young men to Germany to study at Gottingen. It was there that George Ticknor and Edward Everett became converts to the Prussian system of State-directed compulsory education. With the help of an enthusiastic study of Prussian and Hegelian educational philosophy by Victor Cousin, a Frenchman, Ticknor and Everett made State-dominated public education a Unitarian "must."

Mr. Blumenfeld does not allege there was any conscious impulse toward socialism among the Harvard Unitarians. They had not yet yielded Harvard Power to Galbraithians. But it seems significant to him that the Owenites—the followers of Robert Owen—should also be working to impose compulsory State education on Americans in the 1830s. The Owenites had socialist ends in view, but they were willing to let the Unitarians' Horace Mann do the preliminary work in accustoming the American public to the idea that the State could best impose standards of virtue on the youthful mind by



training all the teachers in so-called normal schools. The Owenites, along with Josiah Holbrook of the Lyceum movement, were willing to wait for the day when socialism itself might be defined as the national way of virtue.

Horace Mann, who combined zealotry with a prodigious faculty for political manipulation, had his way all too easily with a country that had not had the opportunity to see how Prussianism could mutate into Bismarckism and, at the last, into Hitlerism. The Unitarians' belief that the State could be the inculcator of an anti-Trinitarian Christian morality was rudely shattered when American education, with Supreme Court blessing, went totally secular. By then it was too late even to save the day for voluntary prayer in the schools.

Mr. Blumenfeld's book is a blow in a good cause. It will help the growing private school movement. But it will take far more than a single book to separate school from State. Public education is a tremendous vested interest: Mr. Blumenfeld says it represents an annual cash flow of \$80 billion. There are more than two million educators who are committed, through their National Education Association and other organizations, to increase the volume of the flow.

Up to the moment, local control of public education in the fifty states

has prevented nationalization of the system in the ultimate Prussian manner. But the existence of a cabinet-rank federal Department of Education could be an omen if the present plans to abolish it aren't carried through.

For myself, I don't expect to live long enough to see the work of Horace Mann undone. But I do expect to see a dramatic increase in competition between the public and the private school. And, with the publication of such books as *Is Public Education Necessary?*, Leonard Read's hoped-for crusade to separate school and State will at least get into a strong uphill second gear. ☸

## IS PUBLIC EDUCATION NECESSARY?

A national commission (1983) confessed that America is a "Nation at Risk"; vulnerable to a flood of functionally illiterate high school graduates. Determined parents across this land are taking the action necessary to liberate their children from the enforced ignorance of compulsory, secular schooling. Some are establishing private schools. Many others are reasserting their right to educate their children at home. This modern exodus has prompted authors and publishers to produce the books and curriculum materials required to reconstruct this nation's private education enterprise. Samuel Blumenfeld, for example, has written How to Tutor and NEA: Trojan Horse in American Education.

Recently, Blumenfeld's Is Public Education Necessary? has been put back into print. Parents and private school leaders are well advised to acquire and read this compelling, factual study of the origin of compulsory education in this country. It may be ordered from Research Publications, P.O. Box 39850, Phoenix, Arizona, 85069 at a cost of \$9.95 a copy. Add \$1.50 for U.P.S. delivery. Those ordering by phone may call 1-800-528-0559.

The reader is reminded that there is no mention of education in the provisions of the United States Constitution. This is consistent with documents of the colonial period showing (p-21) "education was of a very high order and that its freedom from government control was conducive to the spirit of independence the colonists had." Most colonies left the matter of education entirely in the hands of parents. Even in Massachusetts laws ordering the creation of common schools were resisted by numerous "scofflaw" towns.

Blumenfeld further points out that Massachusetts legislators reinstituted the common schools after the Revolutionary War (p-22) "even though the trend toward private education was clearly evident throughout the state." Some 30 years later, Unitarians in Boston pushed through establishment of a public primary school system. They discounted an official report that fully 96 percent of the city's children attended school. Possibilities of charitable tuition payments for the remaining 4 percent from poor families were not explored. The facts and common sense were not permitted to frustrate the "holy" quest to palliate the Unitarians' social conscience at the expense of the taxpayers.

Still later, the Unitarians led the drive to pass legislation centralizing educational control in a state "Board of Education". They also secured the appointment of Horace Mann, a masterful politician, to be the first Secretary of the Board of Education. The new Secretary moved with great effectiveness to introduce Phrenology, a fashionable pseudoscience, and numerous other untested, disruptive innovations into the state education system under his direction. Mann also successfully promoted the adoption of the oppressive Prussian model of compulsory education.

Phrenology along with other innovations were in time thoroughly discredited and dropped. But the coercive cancer of compulsion in education spread from its New England epicenter throughout the entire United States. Mann naively believed that this compulsory system would ultimately foster even in Prussia the assertion by citizens of their right to participate in their own government. Blumenfeld incisively notes that (p-235) "Of course, history proved Mann quite wrong. The Prussian state, dominated by Hegelian statism and pantheism, became successively, Bismark's nationalist Germany, Kaiser Wilhelm's warfare state, the weak Weimar Republic, and finally Hitler's totalitarian nightmare with its pre-Christian Teutonic symbolism, demented racism, and unparalleled barbarism."

The gradual retreat from freedom into coercive, centralized education came about as a result of the efforts of the religious conservatives, the Unitarians, and the atheistic socialists. The Owenite socialists' experiment in communism had collapsed. They had learned from their failure in New Harmony, Indiana that state imposition of secular education would have to precede the institution of socialism in the United States. The liberal, do-goodism of the Unitarians has already been noted. But why were the religious conservatives involved in the promotion of an educational system that excluded the Bible from its curriculum?

Blumenfeld's answer is that (p-134) "the religious conservatives had become more alarmed at the invasion of America by the Roman Catholics than by the heresies of the Unitarians. Someone had persuaded the conservatives that public education would be theirs to control once it became universal." Roman Catholics established their own parochial schools to prevent mass indoctrination of their young people by protestant teachers in the "public" schools. Thus education in this country became a perennial, political battleground for those with conflicting, moral agendas. Confused conservatives were unable to arrest the drift of government schools into increasingly secular programs and practices.

Is Public Education Necessary? Blumenfeld concludes that (p-249) "it was not needed then, and it is certainly not needed today. Schools are necessary, but they can be created by free enterprise today as they were before the public school movement achieved its fraudulent state monopoly in education. Subject education to the same competitive market forces that other goods and services are subjected to, and we shall see far better education at much lower overall cost." When programs for social reform and educational curricula are confused the result is a muddle which seriously hampers the education of the young.