

SOCIOLOGY HISTORY & EDUCATION

A Reader edited by

P.W. MUSGRAVE

Sociology, History and Education

a reader

edited with an introduction

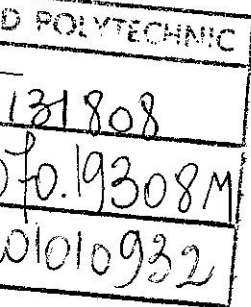
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powerful social forces behind it. These were the days when an untutored illiterate blacksmith, starting with two or three workmen, could, within twenty-five years, build up an industrial empire employing thousands and live to see his sons enter Parliament. From the rough-and-tumble of this fierce struggle, which was the painful birth of industrial man, the universities remained calmly aloof.

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for the fact that he did not approach industry and offer his services. Thus conditioned to independence, it is small wonder that, as the need for skilled engineers grew, industry created its own avenues for the theoretical training which were quite independent of the universities. Thus was created that estrangement between the worlds of industry and education which persists in some measure to this day and which has had such grievous consequences. As though to emphasize the conflict between the two worlds the industrialist created two

4 The Anti-Intellectual Tradition in the West

J. WELLENS

In its struggle with the communist East, the West draws strength from its traditions: devotion to the concept of freedom under the law is perhaps its most powerful silent witness. But not all of these traditions are helpful in the struggle. One of them, a strong anti-intellectual tradition in the social and industrial life of both the United States and the United Kingdom, represents a grave weakness. It is a curious accident of history that this anti-intellectual outlook should afflict both of the two strongest powers in the Western Alliance. In this study I have analysed the origins of this tradition and examined its impact on our industrial situation.

In Great Britain, or, more precisely, in England, the anti-intellectual tradition owes much of its force to the fact that the Industrial Revolution was carried through mainly by pragmatists and artisans at the craft level. At least up to the time of the Great Exhibition of 1851 the Industrial Revolution owed little or nothing to the universities or to men with university training. In the textile trade which sparked off the movement for mechanization Crompton was a typical figure. An impoverished spinner, working entirely on his own, in his own attic and with his own meagre capital, his aim was no more than to provide himself with a more efficient and productive machine, which would give him an advantage over his rivals, from whom the secret was to be withheld. The besieging of Crompton's house by his competitors and the removal of his roofing tiles by these men who were determined that Crompton should not retain his secret, symbolize the brashness of this new movement and give some indication of the powerful social forces behind it. These were the days when an untutored illiterate blacksmith, starting with two or three workmen, could, within twenty-five years, build up an industrial empire employing thousands and live to see his sons enter Parliament. From the rough-and-tumble of this fierce struggle, which was the painful birth of industrial man, the universities remained calmly aloof.

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and in this structure there was no niche created for the man of learning, if only for the fact that he did not approach industry and offer his services. Thus conditioned to independence, it is small wonder that, as the need for skilled engineers grew, industry created its own avenues for the theoretical training which were quite independent of the universities. Thus was created that estrangement between the worlds of industry and education which persists in some measure to this day and which has had such grievous consequences. As though to emphasize the conflict between the two worlds the industrialist created two myths; the 'hard way man' and the 'man with paper qualifications'. The former he endowed with all the virtues and on the latter he poured his unconcealed scorn. The glorification of the 'hard way man' is one of the two great manifestations of the anti-intellectual tradition in British industry.

How persistent this attitude is proving to be is not generally conceded but in this country it still pervades industry from the management to shop-floor workers, with the possible exception of certain enlightened firms: a few of the biggest ones. This anti-intellectual attitude is least in evidence in the two industries in which we discovered our backwardness at the turn of the century — electrical and chemical engineering. The technical problems posed by these two industries could not be solved by rule-of-thumb methods by men with no background of theoretical knowledge. In our own day as we develop new industries, such as electronics and atomic engineering, we are beginning to see the practical man in a truer perspective and, whether we like it or not, our survival depends upon creating a system which will promote harmony between the practical man and the academic and which will synthesize academic education with practical training. But deep go the roots of this aspect of our anti-intellectual tradition. Thus in February 1958 the Carr Committee, after considering for two years the problem of training young people for industrial employment, found itself able to advise that the educational world should be responsible for academic training and that industry should be responsible for practical training, thereby perpetuating this debilitating division, long since abandoned in other countries.

I have identified one source of the anti-intellectual tradition — one which entered industry from below. But a different anti-intellectual influence, no less powerful, was introduced from above. Its power derives from the fact that it originated within the educational system itself. I shall describe this as the 'public school, colonial ethic', but it must be recognized that, in using this term, I am referring to the origin of the code and not necessarily implying that it is universally accepted in public schools today.

In any educational system it is possible to identify two separate aims, one academic and the other ethical. In our country academic standards stem from the universities: the ethical code was set down by the Public and Proprietary schools and is rooted in our colonial tradition.

The colonizing tradition centres round the code of the frontiersman: of its ideals the most outstanding were courage and endurance, the vital frontiersman

virtues. Allied to these were independence, the display of initiative, loyalty to the group and the spirit of competition. The Briton's picture of himself as the embodiment of courage against odds, determined never to show fear or betray his associates, however unworthy (vide 'the sneak'), accorded well with the needs of a colonizing people many of whom would be obliged to live on the frontier. Thus, schoolmasters in England, adopting the classic principle that true education should be a preparation for life, embodied this code of behaviour in their teaching. It is a measure of the importance attached to this code that it grew into such a harmonious system. Games and sports subscribed to the ideal of physical courage and endurance; the residential nature of these schools tended to foster independence, especially of the family; the House system encouraged loyalty within the in-group and the competitive spirit towards the out-group. This was efficient education in the sense that the chosen tools were effective. But if it was efficient, it was also highly specialized: it was education for an aristocracy of leaders and pioneers and it was dominated by the frontier.

Nor were the seeds sown on untilled ground, for the leaders of an earlier age, the Norman barons, had given their sons a practical out-of-doors education, which used sport as a training mechanism and travel to confer a broad outlook; academic knowledge occupied a minor role.

The colonial code has two great weaknesses: it assumes that mankind is mono-sexual and it places little value on academic studies and other things of the mind. Within the colonial code book learning has a very minor part to play, for it is related to the secure home environment. There is no room at the frontier for the man of learning and within this code he has been labelled a 'swot' or, in our own times, a 'boffin' or an 'egg-head'. In the same way there is no room at the frontier for the man of letters, the painter or the musician, occupations which have come to be regarded as slightly cissy because they were pursued only in the soft environment.

So it came about that in an important part of our educational system a code was adopted which had a distinct anti-intellectual bias in the sense that learning and the arts took second place to some attribute called 'character'. It has been fashionable of late to deny that this conflict ever existed but facts have an odd way of asserting themselves. In February 1958 one of the great electrical engineering companies announced its new university scholarship scheme. On that occasion a well-known and distinguished director of that firm said, 'We have been increasingly impressed by the need for intelligence. You want intelligence plus, but you do want intelligence. The old-fashioned combination of brute force and character is not enough.'

The public school, colonial code has had an enormous influence upon our social and industrial life, the more so because it has spread beyond its original boundaries. It was natural that the code should be adopted by the boarding schools and the preparatory schools. It was inevitable that it should, in part, be carried through to the universities which accept recruits at an age at which

behaviour patterns are already established. What is less reasonable is that the code found its way into the women's services.

It is interesting that in one important sector of our educational system, the state grammar schools, the seed fell on stony ground. True enough, grammar schools have their house systems, remarkably ill-adjusted to their needs though these are, but the impetus behind the grammar school was more narrowly utilitarian. Parents saw such schools as the key to the material advancement of their children. Whether this aim is worthy is quite immaterial: the fact remains that parents saw academic knowledge as the key to those jobs which they sought for their children and they communicated this idea to their children and the schools. But two other reasons militated against the grammar schools adopting this code. In the first place the grammar school, legalized by the act of 1902, came after the colonial period; in the second place, the grammar school grew out of the elementary school of the nineteenth century and not out of the public school.

The importance of this code can now be seen from the fact that, although half of the managers of British industry are 'hard way men', public school men comprise 33 per cent of top management. What is more, in the hierarchy of management the public school man tends to settle at the top and in the large organizations: only 19 per cent of all managers are public school men.

Thus, from below, the 'hard way man' has brought with him to industrial management an anti-intellectual tradition which sees conflict between the 'practical' man and the 'academic', while the man conditioned by the old colonial ethic has brought with him an anti-intellectual tradition of another kind; that which sees 'character' as a more desirable commodity than brains.

Let us now consider the two factors which have introduced the anti-intellectual tradition in the United States. America had its own frontier period and this produced a central figure with many of the characteristics fundamental to a colonial code. Enterprise, independence, physical courage, endurance, virility and staunchness in the face of danger were just as necessary on the American frontier as they were in the outposts of the British Empire. When Jefferson in 1803, by that brilliant piece of trading known as the Louisiana Purchase, opened up the West to rapid exploitation, he created a situation which placed a premium on this vigorous type of individual and the American go-getter was born.

But the frontier period gave way to another and it did so at that precise moment in time when the school system was undergoing fundamental changes. Which is cause and which effect is not important to the argument. The classic school, transplanted directly from Europe, appeared in Boston as early as 1635 and by 1850 there were hundreds of these essentially middle-class independent schools, the academies. However the state-provided secondary school came earlier in America than it did in England. The famous Kalamazoo test case, which authorized the state secondary school in America, preceded the English Education Act of 1902 by thirty-two years. So that the American High School emerged

in that period distinguished by the mass immigrations from Europe and, what is more, the establishment of a system of state secondary schools did not result in a dual system of two types of school running side by side, as in England, but largely replaced the independent academies. The problem of American society at that time had become that of welding into one homogeneous nation a flood of immigrants of divergent culture patterns. The emphasis was on belongingness, togetherness and social adjustment and it was this ethic that was adopted, not only by the schools but by a wider community. The message was spread from the pulpit, by the press, by the cinema and by all the organs of mass-communication in turn. Curiously enough, the message appears from time to time in films and plays in quite unexpected forms, even today, long after the need has passed. Conformity was the supreme virtue. But, just as our colonial code has persisted long after the circumstances which produced it have passed, so the American code of conformity has persisted. It is this code that lays it down that intellectual attainment shall take second place, not to 'character' as in our country but to conformity and social adjustment. 'No geniuses here: just a bunch of average Americans working together' runs the much-quoted sound track of Monsanto's recruiting film.

A second feature of the American school system, similar to that already described, often confused with it but quite distinct from it, is no less powerful in promoting the anti-intellectual tradition. To understand it we must understand the special interpretation of democracy which the American applies to his schools. In England popular education was imposed from above by well-intentioned people and societies devoted to good works and by government action. To the American this is the negation of democracy: it is authoritarianism and he will have none of it. We have already seen that the American academies, in which the authoritarian principle applied, withered in the second half of the nineteenth century in the face of the popular movement. In America today schools are the responsibility of each local community: they grew out of the people, and they are, in consequence, democratic. Surely this use of the word 'democratic' is legitimate: where the British educationist parts company with his American colleague is in the assumption that what is democratic according to this criterion is necessarily the best or the most desirable. Democracy's big problem in this context must always be that of maintaining standards.

How much the schools are a local responsibility is seen from the fact that the Federal Office of Education has very little to do with the nation's schools and provides less than 3 per cent of the revenue for them. Even the State Governments provide a mere 40 per cent of this revenue and the remainder, well over half, is derived from the local taxation which each community voluntarily levies on itself. Schools are controlled by local committees, elected directly and not nominated as in this country. These committees have the power to appoint and dismiss all teachers and the Superintendent of Schools. They decide the building programme and the standard of equipment. If democracy goes so far in school

administration little wonder that the curriculum is under democratic influence too. Democracy is taken to mean equality of opportunity for all and this in turn is taken to mean uniform schooling. Uniform schooling, particularly where any form of streaming is frowned upon as undemocratic, tends to become minimal schooling, so that, as one observer has put it, 'In Russia everyone goes to the grammar school while in America everyone goes to the modern school.' According to this conception of democracy 'selective schooling' of the grammar school type is quite abhorrent: it is not democratic. What this means to the outsider not steeped in the American brand of democracy is that the Americans are prepared to sacrifice academic standards to their view of democracy. In fairness we must admit that very few Americans would contest this statement for they see democracy and social adjustment as the greater good, at least as far as schools are concerned. Whether they will continue to do so is another matter. Thus the American school system and the political thought on which it rests have an anti-intellectual bias in so far as intellectual standards are not the primary aim.

It is natural now to turn our attention to the Soviet Union where 'everyone goes to the grammar school'. We are coming, educationists and laymen alike, to recognize that one important measure of a nation's potential is the proportion of its citizens who take higher education and on this assessment we have no reason to be complacent. The advantage enjoyed by the Russians is that they started from scratch twenty-five years ago, relatively unhampered by tradition or preconceived notions. Another advantage is that the government can impose its will and follow through a policy to the end, irrespective of the price, whether this be paid in cash or in human suffering. There can be no doubt that the prospect of grammar school education for all is not a happy one, especially when it is allied, as it is in Russia, to outdated teaching techniques and old-fashioned textbooks. It is interesting to note that the changes announced by Mr Khrushchev on 21 September 1958 seem to suggest that the Russians will be adopting some form of selective education in the near future. One might be excused for thinking that another form of the anti-intellectual tradition exists in Russia: one might imagine that academic standards take second place to political indoctrination but in some curious way the Russians seem to have avoided this pitfall, and they have succeeded in placing intellectual attainment among the virtues.

Basic to any analysis of an educational system are these twin factors of academic content and ethical code. Our own thinking in the field of education is entirely dominated by considerations of academic content and the ethical code which animates and supports it is never held in question. It is reasonable to ask whether our code is outdated. I would say quite definitely that it is. The question then arises, what factors should an up-to-date code contain for education and living in an industrial society? I suggest that there are three main factors. Firstly, there is the academic factor: we must come to recognize the importance of learning and the man of learning. Secondly, there is an industrial factor: we must come to accept continual change as the condition of progress. Thirdly, there is

the social factor: we need a new assessment of man's place in the industrial society; we need to adopt a code that will promote co-operation between men working in the same enterprise but which, at the same time, will not result in men sacrificing their personalities and individualities to the organization.

If we can accept these three factors as the cornerstones of the industrial code we can appreciate the anxieties felt in this and other countries.

In Russia the first two items of the code seem to have been accepted already but the third factor is not capable of solution within an authoritarian régime.

In America the acceptance of change as a condition of progress has long been an accomplished fact: it is the air which the industrial American breathes. The fact that they are so concerned about the problems of the 'Organization Man' suggests that they will solve the social factor. But the problem of placing learning in its rightful place is not possible without major adaptations to an education system to which the Americans are passionately devoted.

What of our country? Unfortunately we do not recognize the problem as such. In so far as we are aware of the existence of an ethical code in our educational system this is largely subconscious and even where there is a more acute recognition of it, the existing colonial code is accepted; rarely questioned.

My purpose in this study is to call attention to the nature of the current code and to its anti-intellectual aspect, thereby hoping to promote some informed comment upon it.