

# ONE ALTERNATIVE TO THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

By CAMROSE BURDEN

On a recent CBC documentary entitled "The School System: What They Want to Produce; Not What We Want to Become", a high school principal in Leamington, Ontario, was asked whether he thought he ran his school well. The principal, well-known for his strict administration, candidly replied to this effect: "Yes, I think I run it very efficiently /cf. 'well' - about 98% of our pupils conform satisfactorily".

I happened to be watching the program with a family whose father was the top personnel administrator for a large company. He immediately congratulated the principal, and remarked with gusto, "That's the kind of teacher we need in our schools. Kids have got to learn that they can't do just what they want to when they get a job. They can't go out for a drink of water or stay home to read a book, if they are holding down a nine-to-five job. Goodness knows, if I had my way I'd like to sit around reading books and doing interesting things, too, instead of working all day, but I have to earn a living."

Like many in similar positions, a "living" includes an expensive car, a summer house, vacations in Bermuda, and clothes bought admittedly for their value as a status symbol. His employees, likewise seek high wages, expensive status symbols, secure employment, and fringe benefits. It is for such jobs that the majority of our community wants people to be trained, in order that it may have the goods it produces as a whole.

I asked Murray Sargeant, superintendent of N.B. School District No. 26, what the aims of the school system in Fredericton and surrounding district were. He hesitated to give a single, specific answer, but rather asked, "Who is to say? Personally, I feel that children should be taught to see different sides to every question. That would be one of the chief aims." He also showed me the vague statement of the objectives given by the Department of Education, which might be summed up, "to help every educable child in New Brunswick (1) to develop to the greatest extent possible, and (2) to become self supporting."

For some people these appear to be conflicting aims, if sought in the mainstream of our society. And when they do, as the business executive mentioned earlier did, they usually choose the latter, to the detriment of the former. In order to support oneself in American-Canadian society, one must cultivate habits such as discipline of appetites (including the appetite for knowledge), slavery to the clock, uniformity of appearance, and most important, unquestioning obedience to authority (or at least a willingness to accept it). These habits are instilled in most of us during eleven, twelve, or thirteen years of school training. During these years a child spends about five hours daily, or about a third of his waking hours, in a classroom where for the most part he is required to learn subjects chosen by someone else, and act like a machine whose attention could never stray to something more interesting than a memorization of the four - count them! - four causes of World War I or of bad breath or of anything else which may be far from a priority item of genuine learning. All of which is superb training for the cogs in the machinery of society. But none of which is necessarily a good education. Consequently, it is not surprising that when the graduates of the system arrive at work or at university, they have no difficulty in "adjusting" - they wear their beanies without a question, although most of them feel like fools.

The schools are changing. Students in N.B. schools are now free to choose more optional subjects, and it is possible, on the new "credit" system, to graduate in the middle of grade eleven. Formerly a student had to complete grade twelve. Teachers are generally younger, and have more years of education behind them when they start teaching. They are, therefore, more open-minded, Mr. Sargeant says. "But," he adds, "we are still bound by society. The successful person today seems, to a lot of people, to be the one with a brand-new car, vacations in Florida, and so on. I'm not sure that that is what success is. But we are bound by society."



The whip theory of knowledge - requirigitation of memorized data - is coming more and more under question.

- CUS PHOTO

In Canada, a number of people have objected to the mainstream schools, which they say are oriented towards providing well-behaved, well-trained personnel for a labour force which has inhuman habits and destructive desires, aided and abetted by governments which reject as "misfits" those who do not conform entirely to the values of the majority of society. Some of those who object have provided an alternative, known as a "free school".

In the first issue of the Canadian National Student Magazine (*Issue*), Terry Campbell describes these schools. There are four in Vancouver, two in Winnipeg, and one in Toronto.

To the casual observer, the atmosphere in a free school is one of chaos. But the casual observer is not on the inside. Those who are on the inside are the kids, and their judgments seem to cast the schools in a very favorable light.

Take 13-year-old Duncan Innes, for example. He is a student at the Barker Free School in Vancouver.

When Duncan goes to school, he is going because he wants to.

Nobody will phone his parents if he doesn't turn up. And yet both Duncan and his parents feel he is getting a far better education this year than in past years.

Before he was sent to the Barker Free School, he was what is known as a "problem child".

"I didn't get along", says Duncan, an unusually articulate youngster for his age, describing his public school career. "I used to throw things and get into trouble."

Duncan says his mother sent him to Barker because of this rebelliousness. "I always liked to hear them shout at me," he says. "But now I like school."

Last year, while attending public school, Duncan missed 30 days because he was "sick". "Sick of school, I guess", he says.

To date this year he has missed only one day. "But I didn't have to say I was sick. I just didn't feel like going so I went somewhere else instead."

Each school day for Duncan begins with a meeting. The students at his school - all elementary age - attend a general meeting each morning at which they decide what they will do for the day.

This aspect of the free school is generally widespread - the active participation by the students in the decision making processes of the school. "If the teachers want one thing and we want another, we outvote them," Duncan says.

The crucial question, however, is whether the free school gives a better education than the traditional public school. "I feel I am learning more now than I was before", says Duncan.

The educational objectives of the free schools differ somewhat from those of most "mainstream" schools.

Bob Barker, the founder of the Barker Free School, says: "What we are trying to do is bring people up so that they are best able to cope with life today and life tomorrow. The mainstream schools are failing at this for two reasons.

"First, the means of the traditional school are too limited. You can't educate people when you have 40 to a class.

"Second, there is the bogey and fear of public opinion. Public school teachers, because they are public servants, are afraid to act. But so are politicians, and they are acting all the time. I call it a bogey because I don't think it actually exists."

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## More Letters to the Editor

Editor:

As a citizen of Canada I have a citizen's responsibility to inform myself of the factors pertaining to issues which are of concern to all Canadians and to all of Canada. One such issue is the war against Vietnam. Referring to Professor Willoughby's letter in the February 1 *Brunswickan*, I would like to point out what I consider errors of emphasis or omission in his letter, based on my study of the factors of this issue.

(1) Professor Willoughby speaks of "stabilization". Does he mean by this the various non-democratically elected "puppet governments" which America has supported in various sovereign countries, for example Greece, the Dominican Republic, Iran, Spain, Portugal, and Haiti?

(2) Professor Willoughby states that the USA is "attempting to end outside aggression against South Vietnam." May I state here that the only foreign troops in Vietnam are those of America and her South East Asian allies, that a majority of the North Vietnamese Liberation Army consists of troops admitted from the South; that even the President of the United States admitted to the results of the Gallop Poll taken in 1956 (the president was

Eisenhower at the time) which indicated that 80% of the people in Vietnam would elect Ho Chi Minh in a free and democratic election; that even the terms South and North Vietnam are arbitrary designations drawn to facilitate the withdrawal of French troops from Vietnam at the end of the war of Vietnam - a war which was financed (estimates usually begin at 70% and wander up to 90%) by that very United States which Professor Willoughby now wishes to establish as the champion of the oppressed. The United States is the aggressor in Vietnam.

(3) I would also like to indicate to Professor Willoughby that Canada too has international responsibilities and commitments - independent of American foreign policy. In 1954 Canada was appointed a position on the International Control Commission along with Poland and India. This position pledges our government to neutrality in the Vietnam issue. How can our claim to neutrality be believed by the international community when we overtly act (and covertly even more so) as a provider of war supplies and munitions for one of the combatants?

(4) Although there are other points of Professor Willoughby's letter which I feel ought to be

challenged, I will end with a discussion of Professor Willoughby's last comment, which is nothing but the usual undemocratic threat of economic sanction which America has wielded so ingloriously and effectively over countries which refuse to be subservient to her imperialistic policies any longer. He states "unless Canada wishes to terminate all joint efforts for the defense of North America, it would not be in her interest, it seems to me, to stop the sale of arms and equipment to the United States." What he is saying here, in effect, is that taking into consideration the fact that 50% of Canadian business and industry is controlled by the United States, that Canada must support America in any war America chooses to wage, or else we will suffer economic suffering and privation. Surely Professor Willoughby realizes that Canada and the U.S. have a joint agreement to defend North America from direct attack from outside, this does not mean and must not mean that Canada must in return forsake all neutrality and become a puppet to America and producer of napalm and Green Berets for America's wars of imperialism against the starving peoples of the Third World.

Linda Muir, P.G.

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B. Edwards, Admin. (4th year)