

FORMAL EDUCATION SEEKS TO ADVANCE THE POSITION OF THE RULING CLASSES

JULIANA C. PINEDA

Instruction Division, Bureau of Public Schools

A review of the general development of Western culture seems to present much evidence to support the allegation that formal education has, among others, maintained or advanced the position of some social class or social grouping.

In primitive society individuals were considered as of more or less equal importance because there were no rigid class distinctions. The concern of the tribe was to pass on the culture intact to every member of the group. As social institutions became more clearly differentiated, however, Eastern cultures began to place more value upon the persons and rights of the privileged classes and less upon the worker and slave. Then as education became also a differentiated social institution, it was naturally assigned to the privileged classes to be controlled and administered in their interests.

In Egypt the priestly class being the most scholarly also became the most powerful. It was the privilege of priests alone to be initiated into the divine mysteries and only the heir to the throne and such priests as excelled in virtue and wisdom were privileged to know the deepest mysteries. It is but natural then that the masses should regard the priests with awe. The priests were most influential because of their superior knowledge and because all others were dependent upon them for highest learning, which opened to the cap-

able the road to government positions. As the priests were the ones who knew the natural sciences, which learning was necessary in adjusting the economic life of the people to the the climate and the behavior of the Nile, they exerted considerable influence upon the social economy. Since they were the ones who knew the "mysteries" which were closely related to the life beyond and the preservation of the body, their hold on the credulous was great. Thus formal education which was in their hands was used as a tool to enhance their power and prestige.

In Athens the relationship between the form and scope of education and of the political ideal was very evident. Between 700 and 400 B. C. when democracy was at its height, education was broad and sought to develop a personality and character of harmonious proportions. Citizenship was more embracing and the citizens made laws for themselves. Therefore they favored the kind of education that developed what they considered as tending toward their own self-realization. From the fourth century B. C. however, democracy declined as a result of the rugged individualism of the capitalistic Greek city states. Then the ideal of a well-rounded development of the whole personality as the best road to good citizenship began to give way to a greater emphasis upon the

intellectual training of the mind. The best educated man was the one who had developed his intellectual capacities to the highest point. It was Plato's conception of education that was accepted. An aristocrat himself, his system of education was based on the proposition that aristocracy was the best kind of society. He paid little attention to education for the great masses of people and favored the ruling classes who had the means and leisure needed. Thus the aristocratic system of education further entrenched the aristocrats in power.

Although Rome had never been as democratic in its political institutions as Greece, during the period of the Republic, education was broader and more closely connected with practical life. During the time of the Empire "public" schools were established, public in the sense that the teachers were given patronage and support, but these schools were designed for the senatorial or knightly classes that constitute the wealthy upper and middle classes. The secondary schools being foreign-language schools did not prepare for life and therefore had no appeal to the masses. Thus in Rome, too, the schools reflected aristocratic society.

During the Middle Ages when schools were directly under the control of the church or at least influenced by its teachings, emphasis was placed on activities claimed to be good for the soul and on reliance on authority. Such teachings naturally enhanced the power of the church and entrenched its positions of influence in society. With the rise of mercantilism and

the formation of a new moneyed class, in the latter part of the Middle Ages, education came to be under another influence. The new rich class paid its way into the universities. The curriculum, therefore, was also adapted to the economic status of these people as well as the old aristocrats. It consisted of the seven liberal arts, which were supposed to develop intellectual powers. In the education of the times there was no concern for the individual's preparation for practical life, which the poorer classes badly needed. Thus the cleavage between groups on the basis of birth and economic status was maintained.

Although the Renaissance was in part a revolt against the supernatural matters taught by the Church and a shift of emphasis was made in favor of the humanities, education at the time was intended mainly for the youth of the upper and wealthy classes. The humanities meant ancient classical language and literature, which had no practical value to the poorer classes, and which was suitable only for the education of a "gentleman." And the concept of "gentleman" required that a man should have been well born, did not have to work for a living, possessed of the art of pleasing and literary language, and engaged in one of the gentlemanly professions, namely, military, diplomacy, or church. It is thus clear that the higher classes prized that type of education which set them apart from the lower classes.

The Reformation gave impetus to universal education as Luther wanted everybody to read the Bi-

ble, but the schools thus became the tool of the Protestant movement. In his reliance, too, upon civil authority, Luther helped bring the schools under civil control. Although vernacular schools were opened to provide universal education, the system as it developed in Germany as a result of the Reformation, even crystallized the distinction between a vernacular elementary education for the lower classes and a classical secondary education for the upper classes. Such universal education, therefore, was distinct from democratic education. Formal education once again functioned for the advancement of a definite group.

In seventeenth-century American when the Reformation influences were supreme, all formal education was dominated by the particular religious group to which it belonged. And most of these groups were strictly authoritarian and intolerant. Since there also existed divisions in society such as those between the rich and the poor and the intellectual and non-intellectual, there was also the distinction between the vernacular elementary schools and the classical secondary schools. As the secondary school actually was a preparation for college, only students who belonged to the leisure class and intended to go to college were attracted by these schools. The schools therefore emphasized the differences between the classes and their graduates became the leaders in both politics and religion.

Even during the period of Enlightenment in Europe when reaction arose against the absolutistic and authoritarian regimes of the

Reformation, and when many humanistic and democratic practices were started, formal education under the direction of enlightened despots and class leaders was made to serve the purposes of those in power. Few were concerned with educating the common people to rule themselves. "Saving their souls, making them better workers, and making them better subjects were the prime motives of most enlightened rulers." Even in America the Great Awakening reaffirmed the traditional liberal arts. Although some leaders began to advocate education for larger number of citizens, the Latin grammar schools and most colleges maintained their essentially aristocratic character, their aim being to prepare men for aristocratic leadership in church and state rather than for directly earning a living.

With the distinctive modern nationalistic movement which started about 1789 came more and more interests in universal education. Even here it can be seen that the purposes of the ruling classes were served by formal education. In Germany where the rulers wanted more power, universal education was promoted to produce obedient, contented, efficient subjects. The philosophy taught and popularized was that which postulated that the individual would attain the highest self-realization only when he identified himself with the state and served and improved it. The individual must subordinate himself to the state. The people must know how to serve God, King, and fatherland with strong skillful bodies, awakened intelligence, and good conscience. The German edu-

cational system must have been efficient as far as this type of indoctrination is concerned for the philosophy got hold of the imagination of the German people to the extent that they were willing to throw body and soul into the service of the state. The wars for the unification of Germany and World War I and World War II are eloquent testimonies.

The difference between the German and the French systems shows how practically the same ideals like nationalism can be used to serve different purposes. Being monarchical, Germany indoctrinated its subjects for the service of the state embodied in the ruler. Under republican France education was promoted to equip its citizens with the intelligence necessary for the perpetuation of free representative government. The internal life of the schools, however, was characterized by strict discipline and obedience of pupils and rigid adherence to state textbooks and curriculum. This fact is understandable in the light of the political vicissitudes undergone by France.

In nineteenth-century United States where opportunities for education for all classes were being offered, the influence of vested interests upon education was clearly discernible. An example is the contents of an elementary textbook entitled **First Lessons in Political Economy** in which the author McVickar glorifies the traditional laissez-faire economic system and opposes governmental interference in business. The rugged individualists was his ideal American citizen.

The extent to which a ruling

party or group could use education to strengthen it and further its end is shown by the achievement of the Nazis. While on the surface the Nazis attacked the two-class, aristocratic system of education and turned their attention to building up the elementary schools at the expense of the secondary schools, in reality the aim was to use the mass schools to instill the Nazi ideology of followership in all children. The new aristocracy to be established was to be based not upon economic class or intellectual achievement, but upon loyalty to the party. Similarly Soviet Russia used the schools in propagating Communist ideology. In Butts' words, the Communists showed, as the Nazis had shown, how effective education could be when turned wholeheartedly to the building of ideals and loyalties appropriate to a guiding policy in the hands of a well-organized and closely knit party that knew where it wanted to go and had the power to shape all educational agencies in that direction.

In the United States today, which is recognized as the bulwark of democracy, the gate to equal educational opportunities has been opened wide. Free education has been provided for all from the kindergarten to the twelfth year and there is a movement to extend it downward to include the nursery school and upward to the fourteenth year. Efforts have been exerted to provide education to the cripple, the subnormal, the genius, and to provide for practically all kinds of individual differences. Even here, however, the schools are not entirely free from the influence of pressure groups.

Jerome Davis declares that education in America is subservient to capitalism. The following are some of his charges:

1. Business interests demand that schools aid them in preparing studies for their profit enterprises.

2. Research has been used to disclose damaging evidence to the cause of municipal ownership, for instance.

3. Any educational practice which encroaches upon profits of business interests is thrown out.

4. Capitalism commercializes graduate schools.

5. The American college executive is biased in favor of existing status quo.

John R. Commons is quoted as saying, "It is not religion but capitalism that governs Christian colleges.

In the university endowment is provided by capitalistic interests, hence education tends to be retracted in harmony with the attitude patterns of capitalists. And the college endowment is invested in capitalistic enterprises, too!"

George S. Counts considers it necessary to devise means of controlling the school that it may not become the subservient tool of some powerful interest or group in the community.

Harl R. Douglass has this to say about lay pressure groups.

"With constantly increasing vigor, various groups of laymen are exerting pressure on the school to teach or not to teach, as the case may be, materials by means of

which they hope students will be influenced to think as the particular group wishes them to think or which might cause them to think and raise questions in ways inimical to the real or fancied interests of the group."

This from Kilpatrick, Dewey, and Bode,

"Nowhere in the world at any time has there been so much teaching of an intimate relation between moral qualities and material reward as in this country. The outworn and irrelevant ideas of competitive private individualism is strenuously inculcated."

Referring to executives, they say, "As school boys almost none of them were ever given any suspicions of the economic order's imperfections and hence they cannot conceive of any questions having any other side than their own."

Perhaps it is but natural that formal education should be made to function for the advancement of the position of some social class, especially the most influential one. Perhaps some form of indoctrination cannot be avoided or may even be desirable under certain circumstances. Maybe the important thing to watch is the manner of indoctrination and its goals. As long as the goals and ends-means procedures are selected through democratic processes, indoctrination may be acceptable. It may be possible, too, that the actuations of the social groups that used formal education as their own tool—throughout the history of civilization—were necessary at the different stages of civilization.