

A HISTORY OF WESTERN EDUCATION

James Bowen

VOLUME III

The Modern West Europe and the New World

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For our three sons

CHRISTOPHER
TORQUIL
ANEURIN

James Bowen

A History of



Western Education

Volume Three

THE MODERN WEST
EUROPE AND THE NEW WORLD

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Preface

‘Terre, terre’ – ‘Land in sight’ – wrote Denis Diderot in 1765 when he completed the famous *Encyclopédie* after more than fifteen years’ labour. This present work has some parallels: the three volumes have also taken some fifteen years, and, by coincidence, I began writing at the same age as Diderot when he commenced his editorial task. The past fifteen years, however, have seen even more momentous changes than those of the mid-eighteenth century when Europe was entering its age of revolutions, and this has created some profound difficulties. While, like Diderot, I looked forward to a safe landfall, the 1980s are emerging as the most troubled years in mankind’s historical experience. Throughout Western history, in every epoch, there has been a rush of ideas that threatened the stability of the existing social order, and, as these volumes have recounted, our heritage is one of continued challenge and, generally, resolution. At present, however, it does seem that events may overwhelm us before conceptual clarity can be achieved and appropriate responses determined, and that situation should be of central concern to the educational historian. Originally, in the early 1960s, while teaching in the United States and then Canada, reacting to this trend of events, I had conceived a revisionist history on what, as I look back, was a modest scale; as the 1960s wore on, the theme of popular affluence and progress increasingly became

counterpointed by a troubled bass, especially as, in the course of essential fieldwork, I visited not only the established historical locations but also a number of those places where modern educational history was being made, beginning with Paris, Rome, Athens in 1968, San Francisco in 1969, and during the 1970s not only throughout the developed world of Europe, North America and Japan but also the socialist world of the Soviet Union, eastern Europe and the People's Republic of China.

My original aim, expressed in the Preface to both Volumes 1 and 2, has not changed, and it remains true, as I wrote there, that the entry of the state into education has accelerated the controversies and conflicts on the nature, purpose and practices of education; and that, moreover, the only really acceptable generalization we can make about the modern period is the popular aspiration that education must be extended as widely as possible. I added that there is, however, no great clarity in the public mind as to why or how this extension should and can be made. The events of the late 1970s served to show that such an observation was both accurate and prescient, chiefly because the educational crisis we shall experience in the 1980s was generated then, when contest for the control of education assumed its current polarized form. The conflict between conservation and creativity on which this work was originally based has remained a central theme, heightened by the fact that the conflict, in recent times, has become ever more highly politicized.

Until recently, educational historiography has not served us well; as several contemporary revisionist historians have argued, most educational histories have concentrated excessively on the development of schools and schooling, and have generally been written from a comfortable Eurocentric viewpoint, recording the inevitable rise of a deserving middle-class, male meritocracy, and promising continued progress to some kind of well-structured democracy in which education would serve to locate each person in his and her proper place. Along with a number of my colleagues, I can no longer accept that earlier twentieth-century Whig conception of educational history, and this work is a contribution to the construction of a new past. In order better to understand the thrust of the entire work, it may be helpful to know that the original working title was *Western Culture and the Process of Education*, and I proposed to examine the interplay between the history of ideas and their institutionalization in the process of education. Even though the title was changed, that concern has remained, and the achievement might profitably be assessed against that original intention. This final volume, then, covers the period of educa-

tional dissent, which became conspicuous in the early seventeenth century and reached crisis proportions in the late twentieth, when the dominant ideologies of progress and equality, generated at the beginning of the nineteenth century, were questioned for the first time on a widespread, popular scale.

Equality was the demand of the *parvenu* bourgeoisie of the age of revolutions (1776–1815); throughout the nineteenth century that *arriviste* class contended with the aristocracy, and, because it gained control over commerce and industry, the bourgeoisie triumphed. In particular, it was supported by the new technologies and methods of science – built upon either pragmatic or positivist assumptions and developed out of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century endeavours – which offered unlimited possibilities of exploitation. Yet the bourgeoisie could not reject the aristocracy: the latter necessarily had to be joined in alliance, and used as a legitimizing force; its traditions were adopted (usually in heightened and ornate forms) by the bourgeoisie as its own. The conservative tradition of education and its privileged system of the grammar school and university, therefore, were retained intact. Indeed, they were strengthened during the age of classical archaeology. The intellectual structures of established nineteenth-century bourgeois society, like its architectural structures, were clothed in the authority of the classical era: as homes, banks, churches and wealthy schools imitated the Parthenon, so education became a romantically heightened and revived imitation of *paideia*.

Throughout the twentieth century this approach continued to characterize the dominant bourgeoisie, now generally known as the middle class. To sustain its new position of dominance it refused to extend equality to the servile working class, and instead adopted an ideology of superiority which it found in the two concepts of culture and natural order. The Eurocentric notion of culture, interpreted here basically as the bourgeois lifestyle, was given heightened expression by James Mill in *On Government*, expanded by Matthew Arnold in *Culture and Anarchy*, and has since been argued by a succession of retainers. At the same time, while there was considerable opposition to Darwin's theories of evolution, paradoxically, his work, despite his intentions, provided a powerful support to middle-class claims for superiority in the concept of natural selection, first developed in *The Origin of Species* of 1859, and almost immediately applied to social hierarchies by Herbert Spencer, who vigorously and successfully promoted the idea of middle-class ascendancy under the title of 'social Darwinism'. To legitimize these concepts the doctrines

of progress and equality were maintained, their effect being to defuse popular, especially working-class unrest.

With this ideology the middle class, manipulated by its élites, held control of education by means of a dual system for more than a century. Working-class cohesion, meanwhile, had grown steadily in the late nineteenth century, but it had not shown an excessive interest in changing the ideals of education or the structures of the schools; generally, it sought greater access and, in large part, accepted the notions of progress and equality. It is important to observe that determinedly progressive liberal forces, in the same period, had been successful in establishing a system of popular schools, although these offered little access to the higher levels of society, much less to power. The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, therefore, assumed considerable significance because it was the first overt recognition of the belief that, if society is to be changed, so also must the schools – thereby running counter to the attitudes of many working-class activists who accepted the tenets of Jeffersonian equality of opportunity and believed that they could make equal attainments within the dual system. Attempts by enlightened European and American liberals to implement reforms, however, were ineffectual on any thorough-going scale: progressive educational practices were outlawed in Europe by Pius XI, Hitler, Mussolini, Franco and Stalin; in the United States these were excoriated as ‘soft’ and ‘pink’ pedagogy by conservatives holding privileged power under the élitist doctrines of social Darwinism. After 1945, this attack was recommenced in the United States in such works as *Educational Wastelands* by Arthur Bestor and extended in Britain with the *Black Papers* by Cox and Dyson.

The question arises: what was the real cause of such violent opposition to progressivism? We must look for answers in the allegedly dangerous and subversive doctrines of holism. Progressivism, in its general and broad sense, stressed the wholeness of the child as an individual and as a social being, and the interrelatedness of knowledge, even when expressed as a curriculum. The privileged élites opposed holism, both as theory and as practice, from its first appearance as *Naturphilosophie* in the work of Goethe, Humboldt and the Weimar Circle: industrial society requires the training only of ‘hands’; whole persons threaten the privileged social order. Moreover, the holist view of man’s place in the unity and harmony of nature was less congenial to the expansion of Western exploitative industrialism than the dualist world-view offered by positivism, with its ideal of man’s progress in the mastery of material nature. So this volume is

centrally concerned with an analysis of the holist movement in the educational work of Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel – and, to an extent, Herbart – and traces the process by which the thought of these educators was debased, and put into schoolroom practice in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in mechanized, degenerate form.

As Marx argued, however, even privilege and wealth are alienating, and class conflict increased throughout the twentieth century; the flashpoint came in the 1970s with a popular rejection of the hypocrisy of privileged morality and leadership. In the 1960s, the threat of ecological crises had begun to appear, and confidence in progress began to decline as industrial development showed up as vast corporate profits for a wealthy élite and as global pollution, poverty and loss of resources for the many. The Vietnam War symbolized public disillusion: young men refused to be slaughtered in a conflict that served the interests only of a secure, manipulative minority. The growing body of research – epitomized in W. L. Guttsman's *The British Political Elite*, Pierre Bourdieu's cultural and social reproduction studies and Richard Titmuss's work in the economics of inequality – showed that ballot-box democracy did not provide for genuine interactive participatory democracy. The people remained, in effect, largely powerless. When President Johnson attempted to mitigate the extremes of deprivation and poverty in the United States and inaugurated the Great Society programme, the commissioned Coleman Inquiry (1966) revealed how badly cancerous the body social was; Christopher Jencks in *Inequality* showed how impotent the people were, and how completely deceived they were about the ability of education to effect democratic social justice. Accompanying this was a rhetoric of dissent and even rage – Illich, Freire, Goodman, Kozol, *et al.* – which was expressed in sustained student violence and teacher-led campaigns that were to end, fortuitously for conservative governments, with the energy crisis and collapse of the world economy in the mid-seventies.

Much of the blame was projected on to the people, and especially on to the 'disruptive' influences of higher education, as the Trilateral Commission report of 1975, *The Crisis of Democracy*, illustrates; consequently, the privileged forces reacted vigorously and, given that they controlled most of the media, induced fear and stimulated a sense of insecurity by heightening the dangers from external chaos: from the overthrow of Allende in Chile to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Welfare for the weak was reduced, thereby weakening them further; in education, campaigns were mounted urging 'back-to-basics' and vocational training,

while tertiary enrolments were reduced in order to return universities and colleges to middle-class membership. In 1971 every European government, west and east, had at least a socialist component in the government; by 1980, among the democracies, only Norway had a socialist element in government. Reaction has held the line for privilege, and educational thought is increasingly becoming understood as a primarily political activity.

Against this background, much current educational activity can be seen as a movement – if not yet clearly articulated – towards changing the entire conception of both society and education. Throughout the world a new morality is emerging which rejects the idea of progress, meritocracy, psychology as an instrument of electronic manipulation where silicon chips rank above persons, the processes of political subordination and lack of public access to decision-making, the alleged necessity of economic inequality and the conception of education as ‘investment’. Above all, there is a growing rejection of the metaphysics and epistemology of positivism. One reason for the failure of the protest movements of the 1960s and 1970s was the lack of a suitable epistemology; one is now being formulated, and changes proposed in the 1970s may, it is hoped, be effected in the 1980s. In order to understand this process, a necessary, related theme here has been the tracing through of the empiricist movement from the original scientific revolution of the seventeenth century down to the conceptual and social disasters of recent positivism and so-called ‘value-free’ research.

Correlatively, certain elements of the new social – and educational – morality are emerging. A central notion is what has been called the ‘ecology of knowledge’, which argues for a return to holism as the only moral, and practical, way ahead. This necessarily involves a renewed concern for, and recognition of, history as an integral part of the present totality; it is issuing as a new ‘third force’ psychology based upon transpersonal and humanistic concerns; a new sociology and politics that focuses on reciprocity; an economics that assumes that people matter. And these, I believe, are being brought together in a new conception of education, amounting in reality to a revolution, which will have to contest in the 1980s with the conservative forces to decide what must eventuate: mankind must either come together in some version of holistic amity or else remain alienated and polarized as a consequence of the continuing ravages of privileged exploitation.

Inevitably, this present volume is highly compressed, and much detail had to be eliminated; indeed, this final version is little more than half of

the first draft. In particular, I would like to have written at greater length on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, although it was necessary to remain conscious of the scale of a narrative that began in Volume 1 with Sumer and Egypt. At the same time, the fact that this study is being translated into other languages has imposed the need to write for more than an English readership; consequently, I have sought to give as wide a coverage of Western education as possible and this, necessarily, has prevented a fuller treatment of some topics. Obviously the impact of late twentieth-century dissent upon educational thought and practice demands more exhaustive treatment; much of this, in effect, has to be the subject of a more specialized monograph, now in progress.

Throughout the preparation of this present volume, I have been assisted by many persons and institutions, and it is a pleasure to acknowledge these sources. Central to all scholarly inquiries, of course, is the patient, tireless work of librarians: I am grateful for their considerable assistance in the Dixon Library at the University of New England, the Fisher Library of the University of Sydney, the Menzies Library of the Australian National University, the Australian National Library in Canberra, the Bodleian at Oxford and the libraries at the University of Toronto and the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Many institutions gave support, and I benefited greatly from the kind assistance of officials in many countries, particularly Dr Jončić of Matica in Belgrade, the officials of the Chinese Ministry of Education who organized my visits in 1975 and 1977, and Professor Markeshevitch, Deputy Director of the All-Union Ministry of Education in Moscow. In particular, I found the preparation of this work immensely strengthened through the good offices of the UNESCO Institute of Education in Hamburg which invited me to act as General Editor of its 1979 Silver Jubilee theory issue of the *International Review of Education*, thereby enabling me to visit a large number of educational institutions and to be in close contact with many significant international educators. In writing the section on the Soviet Union I should particularly like to acknowledge the generosity of the University of Wisconsin Press which allowed me to use material from my monograph on *Soviet Education*.

Over the years I have been assisted by many persons in my work; and I should like to make express recognition of the sustained encouragement of Richard St Clair Johnson, Professor of Classics at the Australian National University, Henry Sifton Harris, Professor of Philosophy at York University in Toronto, and Emeritus Professor H. Lionel Elvin, formerly

Director of the University of London Institute of Education and now Fellow of Trinity Hall, Cambridge. As well, I should like to acknowledge the scholarly assistance in the Spanish sections given by Dr Olives Canals of Barcelona and my Spanish publisher, Editorial Herder. Further, I should like to express my appreciation for the support of the Italian publishers, Arnoldo Mondadori of Milan. Standing quite apart, and contributing in an unfailing way, have been my primary publishers, first Peter Wait and then John Naylor of Methuen who undertook the hazardous task of bringing this trilogy to completion, and my editor of all three volumes, Linden Stafford, for whose scholarship and patience I am deeply grateful.

My greatest debt, as acknowledged in the dedications to Volumes 1 and 2, remains to my wife, Margarita, from whose researches in the history of scientific ideas I have drawn freely, chiefly from her doctoral work in the holist movement of the nineteenth century and her monograph on *Empiricism and Geographical Thought*, with its concepts of 'social empiricism' and the 'ecology of knowledge'. Quite properly, this volume is dedicated to our children who must grapple with the problems that our generation has created; I hope that works like this will be some guide. None the less, I feel that a dedication might equally have read, as for the other volumes, *uxori carissimae Margaritae*.

September 1980

JAMES BOWEN

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