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Readings on State-Instituted Education Compilation

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READINGS ON STATE-INSTITUTED EDUCATION COMPILATION, 2000 Steven Alan Samson

I. EARLY REFORM ERA

PRO: Horace Mann (1841)

The common school is the institution which can receive and train up children in the elements of all good knowledge and of virtue before they are subjected to the alienating competitions of life. This institution is the greatest discovery ever made by man: we repeat it, *the common school is the greatest discovery ever made by man*. In two grand, characteristic attributes, it is supereminent over all others: first, in its universality, for it is capacious enough to receive and cherish in its parental bosom every child that comes into the world; and, second, in the timeliness of the aid it proffers,--its early, seasonable supplies of counsel and guidance making security antedate danger. Other social organizations are curative and remedial; this is a preventive and an antidote. They come to heal diseases and wounds; this, to make the physical and moral frame invulnerable to them. Let the common school be expanded to its capabilities, let it be worked with the efficiency of which it is susceptible, and nine-tenths of the crimes in the penal code would become obsolete; the long catalogue of human ills would be abridged; men would walk more safely by day; every pillow would be more inviolable by night; property, life, and character held by a stronger tenure; all rational hopes respecting the future brightened.

-- *Common School Journal*, vol. 3, no. 1, January 1841, p. 15.

CON: Remarks by Allen W. Dodge, Report of the Committee on Education in the (Massachusetts) House of Representatives, March 18, 1840

The true way to judge of the practical operations of the Board of Education is not merely to consult the statutes by which the Board is established, but also to examine its own reports. . . . A very cursory examination of these documents will suffice to show, that, so far from continuing our system of public instruction, upon the plan upon which it was founded, and according to which it has been so long and so successfully carried on, the aim of the Board appears to be, to remodel it altogether after the example of the French and Prussian systems. . . .

Your Committee have already stated, that the French and Prussian system of public schools appears to have been devised, more for the purpose of modifying the sentiments and opinions of the rising generations, according to a certain government standard, than as a mere means of diffusing elementary knowledge. Undoubtedly, Common Schools may be used as a potent means of engrafting into the minds of children, political, religious, and moral opinions;--but, in a country like this, where such diversity of sentiments exists, especially upon theological subjects, and where morality is considered a part of religion, and is, to some extent, modified by sectarian views, the difficulty and danger of attempting to introduce these subjects into our schools, according to one fixed and settled plan, to be devised by a central Board, must be obvious. The right to mould the political, moral, and religious, opinions of his children, is a right exclusively and jealously reserved by our laws to every parent; and for the government to attempt, directly or indirectly, as to these matters, to stand in the parent's place, is an undertaking of very questionable policy.

Association of Boston Masters (1845)

. . . These soft and silken reformers who wish to smooth the passes to knowledge, and make a world for the young which God has never made, would only spoil the rising generation,

supposing they could carry their plans into execution. A wise man devoutly thanks God that the price of knowledge is labor, and that when we buy the truth, we must pay the price. If you wish to enjoy the prospect at the mountain's summit, you must climb its rugged sides. . . .

* * * *

There was an able report made in the Legislature, written by Hon. Allen W. Dodge, in which the claims of the board were powerfully contested, and some strong arguments used to prove it was positively pernicious. His view, if we recollect aright, was, that the character of New England had always been to lean on no central power; the diffusion of her intelligence was the foundation of her strength. When Great Britain took away the charter of Massachusetts in the commencement of the Revolution, the reason why she did not fall into anarchy was, the little republics, called towns, were every where diffused; an organization existed, strongly fixed and widely spread, which saved us from the horrors our enemies designed for us; that on these towns, and on their officers, rested and must rest mainly the great responsibility in improving education; they were near; a central power would be remote; and however we might select an agent to design and invent for us, the toil and care, the detail and conflict, must be with the school committee and instructors; that even if not so, the very habit of looking to some concentrated point would be pernicious; it would relax our vigilance and impair our strength, just as a limb, swathed in bandages and suspended in a sling, becomes impaired in its vigor by remitting its activity.

-- Association of Boston Masters, *Penitential Tears; or A Cry from the Dust, By "The Thirty-One," Prostrated and Pulverized By The Hand Of Horace Mann, Secretary, Etc.* (Boston: C. Stimpson, 1845), pp. 17, 51.

B. PROGRESSIVE ERA

PRO: John Dewey: excerpts from My Pedagogic Creed (1897)

I believe that

education is the fundamental method of social progress and reform. . . .
every teacher should realize the dignity of his calling: that he is a social servant set apart for the maintenance of proper social order and securing of the right social growth.

in this way the teacher is the prophet of the true God and the usherer in of the true kingdom of God."

-- John Dewey, *Education Today*, ed. Joseph Ratner (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1940), pp. 15, 17.

Rev. Frederick Gates: The Country School of Tomorrow (1913)

Is there aught of remedy for this neglect of rural life? Let us, at least, yield ourselves to the gratifications of the beautiful dream that there is. In our dream we have limitless resources, and the people yield themselves with perfect docility to our molding hand. The present educational conventions fade from our minds; and, unhampered by tradition, we work our own good will upon a grateful and responsive rural folk. We shall not try to make these people or any of their children into philosophers or men of learning or of science. We are not to raise up among them authors, orators, poets, or men of letters. We shall not search for embryo great artists, painters, musicians. Nor will we cherish even the humbler ambition to raise up from among them lawyers, doctors, preachers, statesmen, of whom we now have ample supply. We are to follow the admonitions of the good apostle, who said, "mind not high things, but condescend to men of low degree." And generally, with respect to these things, all that we shall try to do is just to create

presently about these country homes an atmosphere and conditions such, that, if by chance a child of genius should spring up from the soil, that genius will surely bud and not be blighted. Putting, therefore, all high things quite behind us, we turn with a sense of freedom and delight to the simple, lowly, needful things that promise well for rural life."

- Frederick T. Gates, "The Country School of Tomorrow," Occasional Papers, no. 1 (New York: General Education Board, 1913), p. 6.

George Bernard Shaw on the Fabian Socialist influence in British Education (1928)

When schooling is made a national industry, and the Government sets up schools all over the country, and imposes daily attendance on the huge majority of children . . . a conflict arises over the souls of children. What religion is to be taught in the State school? The Government, when it is once committed to general compulsory education, either directly in its own schools or by subsidies to other schools, finds itself driven to devise some sort of neutral religion that will suit everybody, or else forbid all mention of the subject in school.

* * * *

In the case of young children we have gone far in our interference with the old Roman rights of parents. For nine mortal years the child is taken out of its parent's hands for most of the day, and thus made a State school child instead of a private family child. . . . To put it quite frankly and flatly, the Socialist State, as far as I can guess, will teach the child the multiplication table, but will not only not teach it the Church Catechism, but if the State teachers find that the child's parents have been teaching it the Catechism otherwise than as a curious historical document, the parents will be warned that if they persist the child will be taken out of their hands and handed over to the Lord Chancellor, exactly as the children of Shelley were when their maternal grandfather denounced his son-in-law as an atheist.

- Bernard Shaw, The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism, Capitalism, Sovietism, and Fascism (New York: Random House, 1928), pp. 360-61, 412.

John Dewey: A Common Faith (1936)

Secular interests and activities have grown up outside of organized religions and are independent of their authority. The hold of these interests upon thoughts and desires of men has crowded the social importance of organized religions into a corner and the area of this corner is decreasing. This change either marks a terrible decline in everything that can justly be termed religious in value, in traditional religions, or it provides the opportunity for expansion of these qualities on a new basis and with a new outlook. It is impossible to ignore the fact that historic Christianity has been committed to a separation of sheep and goats; the saved and the lost; the elect and the mass. Spiritual aristocracy as well as laissez faire with respect to natural and human intervention, is deeply embedded in its traditions. Lip service -- often more than lip service -- has been given to the idea of the common brotherhood of all men. But those outside the fold of the church and those who do not rely upon the belief in the supernatural have been regarded as only potential brothers, still requiring adoption into the family. I cannot understand how any realization of the democratic ideal as a vital moral and spiritual ideal in human affairs is possible without surrender of the conception of the basic division to which supernatural Christianity is committed. Whether or no we are, save in some metaphorical sense, all brothers, we are at least all in the same boat traversing the same ocean. The potential religious significance of this fact is infinite.

CON: Justice James McReynolds, *Meyer v. Nebraska* (1923)

Although such measures [a law establishing a state-prescribed curriculum in Nebraska that prohibited the teaching in or of foreign languages] have been deliberately approved by men of great genius [Plato's Ideal Commonwealth and Sparta's garrison state] their ideas touching the

relation between individual and state were wholly different from those upon which our institutions rest; and it hardly will be affirmed that any Legislature could impose such restrictions upon the people of a state without doing violence to both letter and spirit of the Constitution. The desire of the Legislature to foster a homogeneous people with American ideals prepared readily to understand current discussions of civic matters is easy to appreciate. Unfortunate experiences during the late war and aversion toward every character of truculent adversaries were certainly enough to quicken that aspiration. But the means adopted, we think, exceed the limitations upon the power of the state and conflict with rights assured to plaintiff in error. The interference is plain enough and no adequate reason therefore in time of peace and domestic tranquillity has been shown (262 U.S. 390, 402).

Justice James McReynolds, *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* (1925)

The fundamental theory of liberty upon which all governments in this Union repose excludes any general power of the state to standardize its children by forcing them to accept instruction from public teachers only. The child is not the mere creature of the state; those who nurture him and direct his destiny have the right, coupled with the high duty, to recognize and prepare him for additional obligations (268 U.S. 510, 535).

Dr. J. Gresham Machen, Princeton Theological Seminary: Testimony before the House and Senate Committees on Education, February 25, 1926 against the proposed Department of Education

The principle of this bill, and the principle of all the advocates of it, is that standardization of education is a good thing. I do not think a person can read the literature of advocates of measures of this sort without seeing that that is taken almost without argument as a matter of course, that standardization in education is a good thing. Now, I am perfectly ready to admit that standardization in some spheres is a good thing. It is a good thing in the making of Ford cars, but just because it is a good thing in the making of Ford cars it is a bad thing in the making of human beings, for the reason that a Ford car is a machine and a human being is a person. But a great many educators deny the distinction between the two, and that is the gist of the whole matter. . . .

Sometimes the theory is held consciously. But the theory is much more operative because it is being put into operation by people who have not the slightest notion of what the ultimate source of its introduction into the sphere of education is. In this sphere we find an absolute refutation of the notion that philosophy has no effect upon life. On the contrary, a false philosophy, a false view of what life is, is made operative in the world today in the sphere of education through great hosts of teachers who have not the slightest notion of what the ultimate meaning is of the methods that they are putting into effect all the time.

* * * *

. . . [A]ll public education should be kept healthy at every moment by the absolutely free competition of private schools and church schools.

A public education that is faced by such competition is a beneficent result of modern life; but a public education that is not faced by such competition is one of the deadliest enemies to liberty that has ever existed.

-- John W. Robbins, ed. *Education, Christianity, and the State: Essays by J. Gresham Machen* (Jefferson, MD: The Trinity Foundation, 1987), pp. 102-03, 106-07.