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Censor gives pleasure to all

The news that a television adaptation of ARISTOPHANES'S Lysistrata has been banned by four West German broadcasting stations on grounds varying from pacifism and political bias to artistic failure and dubious morality will give satisfaction all round. In the first place it will please all who like to see things banned on principle, all haters of literature, and all for whom the faintest suggestion of immorality suffices, without further investigation, for an instant proof of guilt. Then it will please connoisseurs of the ridiculous. It will also please the anti-Germans, and it will please patriots, who will have an occasion for comfortable reflections on the superiority of our own brand of freedom to that enjoyed anywhere else in the "free world". It will please lovers of ancient Greece by its demonstration of the continued potency of Aristophanic satire; the great man was feared then,

and he is still feared today. And it will please those who wish to see the message of the play more widely propagated.

—Times Educational Supplement.

Tender Trap

I would make little distinction in value between talking about middle-class youths being groomed for $10,000 "slots" in business and Madison Avenue, or underprivileged hoodlums fatalistically hurrying to a reformatory; or between hard-working young fathers and idle Beats with beards. For the salient thing is the sameness among them, the waste of humanity. In our society, bright lively children, with the potentiality for knowledge, noble ideals, honest effort, and some kind of worthwhile achievement, are transformed into useless and cynical bipeds, or decent young men trapped or early-resigned, whether in or out of the organized system. My purpose is a simple one: to show how it is desperately hard these days for an average child to grow up to be a man, for our present organized system of society does not want men. They are not safe. They do not suit.

—PAUL GOODMAN: Growing Up Absurd.

Ultimately the social function of education is to perpetuate society: it is *the* socialising function. Society guarantees its future by rearing its children in its own image. In traditional society the peasant rears his sons to cultivate the soil, the man of power rears his to wield power, and the priest instructs them all in the necessity of maintaining a priesthood. In modern governmental society, as Frank MacKinnon put it in The Politics of Education:

state. For whose purposes is the pool to be dredged? The state's. Are we really worried about pursuing equality of opportunity if it simply means the opportunity to become Top people? How can we possibly talk of parity of esteem, when a grammar school child receives 70% more per year in expenditure than a child in a secondary modern school and nearly double per school life? Especially when we remember that four-fifths of the population attend secondary modern schools and not grammar schools.

We need to affirm *today* the values implied in the imaginary Chelsea Manifesto. It is not a matter of whether or not a classless society is possible or whether status can be divorced from occupation, but simply one of affirming that "the poorest he that is in England hath a life to live as much as the greatest he". It means questioning the social functions that education plays in our society, and stressing the individual functions that it could play. It means affirming the autonomy of the pupil as a person, and not as a tiddler in the pool of ability, the autonomy of the teacher for what he can give his pupil, not for what he can produce to the specification of the government or Imperial Chemical Industries. It means focussing our attention on the classroom at the bottom of the educational hierarchy and not on the room at the top.

> "The educational system is the largest instrument in the modern state for telling people what to do. It enrols five-year-olds and tries to direct their mental, and much of their physical, social and moral development for twelve or more of the most formative years of their lives."

To find a historical parallel to this situation you would have to go back to ancient Sparta, the principal difference being that the only education we hear of in the ancient world is that of ruling classes. Spartan education was simply training for infantry warfare and for instructing the citizens in the techniques of subduing the slave class, the helots, who did the daily work of the state and greatly outnumbered the citizens. In the modern world the helots have to be educated too, and the equivalent of Spartan warfare is the industrial and technical competition between nations which is sometimes the product of war and sometimes its prelude. The year in which Britain's initial advantage in the world's industrial markets began to wane, was the year in which, after generations of bickering about its religious content, universal compulsory education was introduced, and every significant development since the Act of 1870, had a close relation to the experience, not merely of commercial rivalry, but of war itself. The Acts of 1902, 1918 and 1944 were all born of war, and every new international conflict, whether in rivalry for markets or in military techniques, has been the signal for a new burst of concern in different countries over the scale and scope of technical education among the rival powers. Thus the explosion by America of the first atomic bombs was a signal to Russia to hasten the pace of technical and scientific education, and Russia's success in putting the first sputnik into space, led to an outburst of self-criticism in America about the shortcomings of the American educational system, and to a concern about the quality and availability of technical education in both Britain and America which is still in full swing.

There is no evidence that the distribution of intelligence either between nations, or among the social classes within nations is anything but random. We cannot really speak of the inhabitants of one country or one social class as being more or less intelligent than those of another. But the intelligence of an individual at birth exists not as a fact but as a potential which has yet to be developed (as the histories of so-called feral children show). The conditions for the greater or lesser development of this potential depend however, on social, economic or political factors. Access to education is unevenly distributed. If a society aimed at the maximum development of the latent talent of every member of its population for some supposed national or social end, it would have to reveal and foster it as early as possible in the individual's life. The principal obstacle to this is the existence of the family, which is one reason why the educational systems of elitist and totalitarian societies are hostile to the family as an institution.

The family is the basic social group, and within it members share the same social status and standard of living, which are determined by the position of the breadwinner in the social and occupational hierarchy. The children thus enjoy or endure a position in this hierarchy which they "inherit". But social and economic status derive in modern society from occupation which in turn derives from education and thus when the children cease to be children their status derives from their access to education. But those with high status have a parental vested interest in preserving the education considered appropriate to their status for their children. We see this very clearly in our own society, and it is equally obvious in theoretically more equalitarian societies. We cannot assume, in any case, that every individual child will put education, or the social fruits of education, high on its list of priorities in life. It has therefore to be presented to the child as a means to economic, or status rewards, or as a rewarding end in itself. The family which has these values will use them to motivate its children. The family which has other values — early earning and independence, working-class soli-

a Populist movement arises, consisting of dissident intellectuals, mainly women, who declare in the Chelsea Manifesto of the year 2009:

> "The classless society would be one which both possessed and acted upon plural values. Were we to evaluate people, not according to their intelligence and their education, their occupation and their power, but according to their kindliness and their courage, their imagination and sensibility, their sympathy and generosity, there could be no classes. Who would be able to say that the scientist was superior to the porter with admirable qualities as a father, and civil servant with unusual skill at gaining prizes superior to the lorry-driver with unusual skill at growing roses? The classless society would also be the tolerant society, in which individual differences were actively encouraged as well as passively tolerated, in which full meaning was at last given to the dignity of man. Every human being would then have equal opportunity, not to rise up in the world in the light of any mathematical measure, but to develop his own special capacities for leading a rich life."

This is regarded as merely sentimental by the meritocrats of the future. Today it sounds platitudinous to the mind nourished by the classical socialist and anarchist thinkers, but the immense distance that we are from such a society illustrates how the fertile aspirations of educational reformers have been perverted by social and governmental pressures in the opportunity state, and how disastrously we have lost sight of the *individual* functions of education.

How far the notion of the "pool of ability" is from the idea of enabling the individual "to develop his own special capabilities for leading a rich life". Who is to go fishing in the pool of ability? The

three grades correspond "roughly but by no means exactly, to the gradations of society."

English education, quite apart from its built-in class bias, is as Michael Young put it, an obstacle race from start to finish, an endless process of selection and rejection with the implied question all the while: Will this horse run well enough to justify his place in the stable? In his radio investigation of "Pressure at Eighteen-Plus", Dr. Young concluded:

> "If a child is put at the top table when he is five, he still may not get into the A stream at seven. If he is in the A stream at seven he still may be weeded out later. Many compete but most are rejected, and the sense of failure that results is sometimes psychologically crippling. The way things are going, the schools are in danger of making the Britain of 1960 a nation of failures with only a thin elite of super-trained people at the top."

In his Rise of the Meritocracy, a satire, the point of which consists in projecting into the future the pursuit of the doctrine of equality of opportunity, he looks back on our own day as one where "two contradictory principles for legitimising power were struggling for mastery — the principle of kinship and the principle of merit." Merit wins in the end, and with the perfection of intelligence testing, and consequently with earlier and earlier selection, a new non-self-perpetuating elite is formed of "the five per cent of the population who know what five per cent means." The top jobs go to the top brains, and Payment bybottom people. The people at the bottom are not only treated as inferior: they *know* they are inferior. But to select the few is to reject the many, and in the meritocratic society new social tensions arise. Although the new working class no longer has men of outstanding intellectual ability, since these have been creamed off by selection,

darity, non-postponement of satisfactions — will not. We may thus say that absolute equality of opportunity and the utmost exploitation of the nation's brain-power — the "pool of ability" as it is called, are not compatible with the continuance of the family system.

This explains why J. M. Pringle's article on the English "public" school system in the February issue of Encounter is called "The British Commune". Mr. Pringle notes that "in every age and in every country, those who have wanted to create loyal and disciplined servants for some cause or party or organisation have recognised that families — and especially the women in the family — are the great obstacle which must be circumvented". The obvious starting point for this argument is Sparta and those ideas in Plato's Republic which derived from Sparta. He sees the most successful of such attempts to be the Roman Catholic Church with its celibate priesthood and its monasteries. And he suggests that the English "in their own typical, unthinking, half-hearted, but efficient way" have evolved their own version of the Platonic idea.

> "In the 19th century, when they began to realise the need for a loyal, disciplined class of public servants to rule their rapidly growing empire, they did not insist that the members of this class should remain celibate or should hold their wives in common. More gently — but quite as effectively — they simply took them away from their homes and families from the age of 9 or 10 to 18. They were rightly confident that, after four years in a preparatory school and five years in a public school, these boys would not only be reliable public servants: but would be immune to the persuasion of mothers, sisters and wives who might tempt them to put the interests of their families above the interests of their country. The English version of Plato's republic and the Chinese Commune was the Public School."

He describes the system as "one of the most striking and successful *political* devices ever conceived by a ruling class." Now you might suppose that, with the decline of empire, the widening of the franchise, and the gradual development of a state system of secondary education, the public schools would be in a state of decline. But this is very far from the case. With new endowments — and the 3½ million pound industrial fund for providing them with science laboratories — they are flourishing as never before. People do not pay three or four hundred pounds a year to place their children in the diminishing ranks of the empire-builders, they pay for the provision of a place in the élite for their children.

Education must always have been one means of upward social mobility for some individuals: the slave scribe in ancient society who became a free man, the young man in ancient China who was selected as qualified to study for the examinations leading to a place in the bureaucracy, the poor boy in mediaeval society who became a priest and the poor boy in the nineteenth century who became a pupil teacher. It is a commonplace that the more the barriers to mobility are removed, the greater the striving for mobility, and now that we have a theoretically complete educational mobility, people are very sensitive to the limits placed upon it. Hence the various investigations during the last ten years demonstrating that the middle-class child has more chance of attending a grammar school than the working class child, that the public school boy has a very much greater chance of attending one of the older universities than a grammar school boy, and that he has an infinitely greater chance of becoming a top civil servant, a captain of industry, an MP, a cabinet minister or a bishop. Here three of the functions which education plays in our society are in conflict: the notion of the maximum use for the state's purpose of the pool of ability, the use by one social class of education as a means of upward social mobility, and the determination of another social class to maintain its hold on the citadels of occupational privilege.

But let us suppose that the privileged private sector of the education system were abolished or transformed or absorbed in some way. Those whose passion was for equality of opportunity would then have to fall back on the "home background" argument which is already used to explain why the middle class draws so much more from the grammar schools than the working class. The next step, both in the interest of equal opportunity and of maximum use of the pool of ability, would be to withdraw children from home backgrounds which did not show the required level of aspiration, presumably by extending the already flexible notion of children being "in need of care and protection" to include being in need of an appropriate educational background, i.e. a middle-class home.

On January 9th the television programme Panorama described a private school which exists to cram children for the 11-plus examination, claiming 75% success in obtaining grammar school places for its products. "The earlier they start to live in a competitive spirit the better" said one parent. "It's too early for art and all that" said another. Art and all that — the basis of primary education in the progressive school has in fact become a consolation for the non-starter. Thus in a "streamed" primary school, the A-stream children bring home in the evening books of tests in arithmetic, English and "intelligence", while the B-streamers bring home models, puppets, baskets — art and all that, for it isn't only private schools which are affected by the parental urge for cramming. A whole series of reports on secondary education, from the Taunton Commission of 1868, the Hadow Report of 1926, the Spens Report of 1938 and the Norwood Report of 1943 have laid down what *secondary* education should be like, and the primary schools have developed accordingly. The Norwood Report divided the children of the country into three sorts, with three types of mind and three kinds of ability, which conveniently fitted the three types of secondary education available in this country, which were in essence the three grades of school recommended by the original Taunton Commissioners of 1868, who in turn declared that the distinctions between their