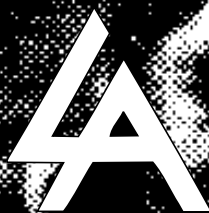


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FOR LIFE, LIBERTY AND PROPERTY

IVAN ILLICH AND THE DESCHOOLING MOVEMENT

DAVID BOTSFORD

One of the achievements of libertarian historical scholarship has been the rediscovery of individuals and movements from the past who were motivated by concerns about individual liberty, opposition to all-encroaching state power, property rights, and the right of individuals to freely exchange those rights. Examples from the modern world include the 16th-century French political philosopher Étienne de la Boétie, the Levellers of the English civil war, and such 19th-century American individualist anarchists as Benjamin Tucker, Lysander Spooner, and Josiah Warren, whom we would today describe as “anarcho-capitalists” because of their recognition that any real freedom—particularly for the poor and the politically marginalised—depends on the existence of secure private property rights, an insight which regrettably eludes socialist anarchists. Claims have also been made—perhaps more contentiously—that various figures from ancient Greece, India and China should also be considered part of the libertarian canon. These thinkers and movements, whose significance was neglected while the statist ideology went almost unchallenged, now speak to us in the language of the libertarians of today.

I will now examine a body of ideas of far more recent vintage. Thirty years ago, these ideas were in their infancy; yet only fifteen years ago they had almost entirely vanished from both academic discussion and the attention of the mass media. I refer to the deschooling movement.

The establishment by the state of special institutions which every young person was forced by law to attend, full-time, for a period of years, to learn a curriculum laid down by the state or its agents, marked both the most significant extension of the power of the state over the individual in modern history, and also a decisive break with the idea, central to both the Graeco-Roman and Western civilisations, and formulated by such figures as Saint Basil and Michel de Montaigne, that education was the individual’s voluntary search for truth. This was the concept of a “liberal education”. Compulsory schooling has always had a primarily political, rather than educational, purpose. It was invented in the 16th century, during the Reformation, both in the Protestant German states, under the influence of Martin Luther, and in Geneva, under the rule of John Calvin, as a means of subordinating the individual to the new Protestant religion and to the political regime into which it was integrated. In the early 18th century, the establishment of compulsory state schools under Friedrich Wilhelm I, king in Prussia, was an integral part of the construction of the most highly militarised state in Europe. In 1806, the Napoleonic Empire also established schools which every young person was compelled to attend. Throughout the 19th century in other Western countries, and subsequently in the rest of the world, the state established compulsory schooling, for the purpose—often quite openly stated—of manufacturing individuals whose attitudes, behaviour and beliefs were moulded in such a way that the large majority of them would submit to being controlled in both thought and action by the political rulers. This political conscription was partly a response to the emergence of mass societies, in which the individual was no longer subject to the forms of social control exercised in traditional agricultural communities, and was increasingly able to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the extended market order which increased economic freedom had brought about. The development by common people of educational resources of their own, free from state control, was considered particularly dangerous: in late Victorian England, the state nationalised the working-class private schools in which the overwhelming majority of the population had achieved literacy decades before the state set up its first schools after 1870.

TWO TYPES OF INSTITUTION

In the Western world, the 19th century saw the expansion of two types of institution. The first was voluntary institutions which facilitated individual choices, such as stock exchanges, postal services, department stores, hotels and public libraries. The individual was under no legal obligation to patronise these institutions, could typically use them to obtain the chosen goods and services from any supplier, and could physically leave whenever he or she wished, without asking anybody’s permission. (This remained the case even after some of these institutions were taken over by the state.) The second was coercive institutions in which both market relations and the rule of law were abandoned.

One example of this second tendency was what Professor Thomas Szasz calls the “manufacture of madness”. Individuals whose behaviour was arbitrarily classified as “abnormal”, or who argued with their relatives, or who suffered from depression, were “diagnosed” as “suffering from mental illness” and “put away” for psychiatric “treatment” either in state-owned coercive institutions, or private ones to which the coercive powers of the state had been franchised. Although these individuals had not been even charged with breaking any law, let alone convicted, they were stripped of their legal rights, and were forcibly prevented from leaving the “mental hospital” until the psychiatrists pronounced them “cured”—a condition for which no agreed definition existed. A vast taxpayer-financed empire of “mental health” grew upon these foundations, along with ever-growing armies of psychiatrists with a vested career and financial interest in discovering new “mental patients” and “mental health problems”.

At the same time, the state established institutions to which young people, too, were forcibly “put away” for a period of years, during which they were deprived of individual freedom, the protection of the rule of law and the right to walk out of the door. The compulsory school explicitly repudiates the model of a voluntary network which would facilitate free exchanges of knowledge by diverse individuals throughout society. On the contrary, the guiding principle is that young people—and even their parents—“don’t know what’s in their own best interests”, and therefore have to be threatened with violence and forced into special institutions in order to learn anything. What the young are taught in school is restricted to the subject matter which the school imposes on them. Indeed, in Britain today a committee actually sits in Whitehall and promulgates a curriculum which every young person in every state school throughout the country is forced to learn and be tested on, without the slightest possibility of flexibility or choice.

AN EDUCATIONAL MARKETPLACE

The present model was by no means the only one in which the education of young people could have been addressed. One could envisage one which brought together potential suppliers of all forms of learning, and the families who constituted potential consumers, and enabled consumers to freely choose a “package” of different services from different suppliers, in accordance with the unique requirements of each individual. The legal nature of such exchanges would be no different from those the family made when it went out shopping: no consumer would be forced to patronise any supplier of any educational service, and consumers would be free to switch suppliers without notice and without asking permission if they became dissatisfied. Within such a model, there would be only two areas in which a plausible argument for limited intervention might be made: first, to ensure that every family had sufficient financial resources to be able to exercise effective demand within the educational marketplace, and,

second, in those individual cases where gross parental negligence had been proven in a regular court of law, the court could rule that the children were required to obtain educational services from specified private suppliers; in such cases, however, the court would be legally obliged to follow as far as possible the individual wishes, interests and aptitudes of the children in appointing suppliers. The strongest legal and constitutional protections would, however, have to be put in place to prevent state intervention from going any further than this. Unfortunately, that hasn't quite been the way things have turned out so far.

To understand the difference between the two types of institution, imagine that the Stock Exchange was run like the schools, and that the state forced everyone to invest all their money in a portfolio comprising British Coal, British Rail and British Leyland—with no guarantee of compensation for losses. Imagine that retail stores were run like the schools, and that a Whitehall committee drew up a list of goods which everybody was compelled to buy from their local state-owned store. Imagine that public libraries were run like the schools, and that the state forced adults to visit their local library for seven hours a day and to read—and be examined on—a certain list of books decided upon by that same Whitehall committee. Conversely, imagine that education was run on the basis of a voluntary network which would enable any individual freely to contract to learn anything from anybody who was prepared to teach it.

Along with compulsory schools came a new high priesthood of “educationalists” who, they claimed, alone possessed the mystical and esoteric knowledge of how to teach the inmates of these institutions. Neither young people nor their parents were invited to decide what was taught, how and by whom within the schools: their only contribution was either to undergo it without complaining or to pay for it through taxation. Within each country, these “educationalists” established a vast bureaucratic empire which consumed an ever larger proportion of the taxpayers’ income. They succeeded in imposing on society the illusion that the more taxpayers’ money was allocated to them, and the longer the period of internment imposed on young people, the more educated and richer the country would become. Everywhere the period of forced school attendance was steadily increased, until we have reached the situation in Britain today where the sentence for the crime of turning five is eleven years’ imprisonment, without trial and without the possibility of parole.

ILLICH AND DESCHOOLING

Only in the 1960s did a significant group of thinkers mount a systematic and powerful challenge to compulsory schooling. Indeed, it is precisely because their critique was so devastating that we hear so little about the deschooling movement today. Let us therefore examine one of the key texts of that movement: *Deschooling Society*, by Ivan Illich, which was first published in 1971. Many free marketeers will associate Dr Illich primarily with certain aspects of the Green movement, and thus may be inclined to arbitrarily dismiss his opinions on other subjects. Yet a central theme of Illich’s writing is the right of individuals to take direct control over their lives, free from coercive institutions. Everybody has the right to have his or her ideas examined one at a time, and Illich’s opinions on education not only earn him release from the libertarian Rogue’s Gallery, but even put him on the shortlist for inclusion in the libertarian Pantheon.

Illich was born in Austria, and obtained his PhD from the University of Salzburg. In 1951 he went to work for the Roman Catholic Church in New York, and from 1956 to 1960 he was vice-rector of the Catholic University of Puerto Rico. In 1958 he met Everett Reimer, an American, who first convinced him that compulsory schooling was a hindrance to education. In the 1960s, Illich, Reimer and others established and ran the Centre for Intercultural Documentation in Cuernavaca, in Mexico. Here Illich directed seminars on “institutional alternatives in a technological society”, with special reference to the problems of Latin America, and it was here that the deschooling idea was fully developed. Now there is a certain type of British Conservative who, on

hearing the phrases “institutional alternatives”, “Latin America” and “the 1960s” in rapid succession, will become somewhat unreceptive to any ideas which follow. If there are any such individuals now reading this, I appeal to them to continue reading with an open mind.

Illich argues that the “modernization of poverty”—its control by bureaucracies—adds further obstacles to those already faced by the poor:

Welfare bureaucracies claim a professional, political and financial monopoly over the social imagination, setting standards of what is valuable and what is feasible. This monopoly is at the root of the modernization of poverty ... For instance, the US poor can count on a truant officer to return their children to school until they reach seventeen or on a doctor to assign them to a hospital bed which costs sixty dollars per day—the equivalent of three months’ income for a majority of the people in the world. But such care only makes them dependent on more treatment, and renders them increasingly incapable of organizing their own lives around their own experiences and resources within their communities.¹

The extension of schooling led to increased demands for certification which excluded the poor from an increasing number of careers:

A good example is the diminishing number of nurses in the United States, owing to the rapid increase of four-year B.S. programmes in nursing. Women from poorer families, who would formerly have enrolled in a two- or three-year programme, now stay out of the nursing profession altogether.²

Latin American countries were foolishly imitating this institutionalisation of poverty:

Their laws make six to ten years of school obligatory. Not only in Argentina but also in Mexico or Brazil the average citizen defines an adequate education by North American standards, even though the chance of getting such prolonged schooling is limited to a tiny minority. In these countries the majority is already hooked on school, that is, they are schooled in a sense of inferiority towards the better schooled ... [T]he mere existence of school discourages and disables the poor from taking control of their own learning. All over the world the school has an anti-educational effect on society: school is recognised as the institution which specializes in education. The failures of school are taken by most people as a proof that education is a very costly, very complex, always arcane and frequently almost impossible task. School appropriates the money, men and goodwill available for education and in addition discourages other institutions from assuming educational tasks.³

THE DISESTABLISHMENT OF SCHOOL

Illich argues that this must change:

Now we need the constitutional disestablishment of the monopoly of the school, and thereby of a system which legally combines prejudice with discrimination. The first article of a bill of rights for a modern, humanist society would correspond to the First Amendment to the US Constitution: “The State shall make no law with respect to the establishment of education.” There shall be no ritual obligatory for all.

To make this disestablishment effective, we need a law forbidding discrimination in hiring, voting or admission to centres of learning based on previous attendance at some curriculum. This guarantee would not exclude performance tests of competence for a function or role, but would remove the present absurd discrimination in favour of the person who learns a given skill with the largest expenditure of public funds or—what is equally likely—has been able to obtain a diploma which has no relation to any useful skill or job. Only by protecting the citizen from being disqualified by

anything in his career in school can a constitutional disestablishment of school become psychologically effective.⁴

He argues that most learning occurs not in school, but casually, for example, mastering first, second and third languages from people around the learner. Old-fashioned drill learning can be used to effectively convey a skill *which the student voluntarily chooses to learn*:

[T]here are many skills which a motivated student with normal aptitude can master in a matter of a few months if taught in this traditional way. This is as true of codes as of their encipherment; of second and third languages as of reading and writing; and equally of special languages such as algebra, computer programming, chemical analysis, or of manual skills like typing, watchmaking, plumbing, wiring, TV repair; or for that matter dancing, driving and diving.⁵

He calls for a transfer of financial resources away from the state schools back to the individual in the form of educational vouchers to enable this process and to break the power of the bureaucracies:

[T]here should be no obstacle for anyone at any time of his life to be able to choose instruction among hundreds of definable skills at public expense. Right now educational credit good at any skill centre could be provided in limited amounts for people of all ages, and not just to the poor. I envisage such credit in the form of an educational passport or an 'edu-credit card' provided to each citizen at birth. In order to favour the poor, who probably would not use their yearly grants early in life, a provision could be made that interest accrued to later users of cumulated 'entitlements'. Such credits would permit most people to acquire the skills most in demand, at their convenience, better, faster, cheaper and with fewer undesirable side-effects than in school.

Potential skill teachers are never scarce for long. ... But, at present, those using skills which are in demand and do require a human teacher are discouraged from sharing these skills with others. This is done either by teachers who monopolize the licences or by unions which protect their trade interests. Skill centres which would be judged by customers on their results, and not on the personnel they employ or the processes they use, would open unsuspected working opportunities, frequently even for those who are now considered unemployable. Indeed, there is no reason why such skill centres should not be at the work place itself, with the employer and his work force supplying instruction as well as jobs to those who choose to use their educational credits in this way.⁶

Illich gives an example from his work with the Roman Catholic Church which illustrates the potential of an educational system freed from the professional teaching monopoly:

In 1956 there arose a need to teach Spanish quickly to several hundred teachers, social workers and ministers from the New York Archdiocese so that they could communicate with Puerto Ricans. My friend Gerry Morris announced over a Spanish radio station that he needed native speakers from Harlem. Next day some two hundred teenagers lined up in front of his office, and he selected four dozen of them—many of them school dropouts. He trained them in the use of the US Foreign Service Institute (FSI) Spanish manual, designed for use by linguists with graduate training, and within a week his teachers were on their own—each in charge of four New Yorkers who wanted to speak the language. Within six months the mission was accomplished. Cardinal Spellman could claim that he had 127 parishes in which at least three staff members could communicate in Spanish. No school programme could have matched these results.

OPENING THE MARKET

Skill teachers are made scarce by the belief in the value of licences. Certification constitutes a form of market manipulation and is plausible only to a schooled mind. ... Oppor-

tunities for skill-learning can be vastly multiplied if we open the 'market'. This depends on matching the right teacher with the right student when he is highly motivated in an intelligent programme, without the constraint of curriculum.

Free and competing drill instruction is a subversive blasphemy to the orthodox educator. It dissociates the acquisition of skills from 'humane' education, which schools package together, and thus it promotes unlicensed learning no less than unlicensed teaching for unpredictable purposes. ... We need a guarantee of the right of each citizen to an equal share of tax-derived educational resources, the right to verify this share and the right to sue for it if denied. It is one form of a guarantee against regressive taxation.⁷

Illich argued further that "if schools are the wrong places for learning a skill, they are even worse places for getting an education," because

[S]chool is obligatory and becomes schooling for schooling's sake: an enforced stay in the company of teachers, which pays off in the doubtful privilege of more such company. Just as skill instruction must be freed from curricular restraints, so must liberal education be dissociated from obligatory attendance.⁸

Any individual should be able to meet any other individual or individuals for discussion of a book, article or anything else:

The equal right of each man to exercise his competence to learn and to instruct is now pre-empted by certified teachers. The teachers' competence, in turn, is restricted to what may be done in school. ... We permit the state to ascertain the universal educational deficiencies of its citizens and establish one specialized agency to treat them. We thus share in the delusion that we can distinguish between what is necessary education for others and what is not. ... The very existence of obligatory schools divides any society into two realms: some time spans and processes and treatments and professions are 'academic' or 'pedagogic', and others are not.⁹

THE INVENTION OF "CHILDHOOD"

Illich shows that the concept of "childhood", as distinct from infancy, adolescence and youth, under which young people are deprived of the elementary rights enjoyed by older people, is one of relatively recent historical vintage, only becoming universal in the Western world in the 19th century. The religious ceremonies of confirmation and the bar-mitzvah originally marked the recognition that the individual had become a responsible adult with the same rights and freedoms as every other adult within the community. As the law continually extended "childhood", these rituals lost this meaning, and the individual had to undergo a further six or seven years of legally-enforced child status. Yet in Latin America and other poor parts of the world, young people aged 11 or 12 were still accepted as having the same legal and social rights and privileges as adults. Illich argues that:

If there were no age-specific and obligatory learning institutions, 'childhood' would go out of production. The youth of rich nations would be liberated from its destructiveness, and poor nations would cease attempting to rival the childishness of the rich. ... Only by segregating human beings in the category of childhood could we ever get them to submit to the authority of a schoolteacher.¹⁰

Illich argues that because school attendance is full-time and compulsory, it makes the teacher into custodian, moralist and therapist. As custodian, the teacher "acts as a master of ceremonies, who guides his pupils through a drawn-out labyrinthine ritual." As moralist, "He stands *in loco parentis* for each one and thus ensures that all feel themselves children of the same state." As therapist, he "feels authorized to delve into the personal life of his pupil in order to help him grow as a person."¹¹ Illich continues:

The safeguards of individual freedom are all cancelled in the dealings of a teacher with his pupil. When the schoolteacher

fuses in his person the functions of judge, ideologue, and doctor, the fundamental style of society is perverted by the very process which should prepare life. A teacher who combines these three powers contributes to the warping of the child much more than the laws which establish his legal or economic minority, or restrict his right to free assembly or abode ... Children are protected by neither the First nor the Fifth Amendment when they stand before that secular priest, the teacher. The child must confront a man who wears an invisible triple crown, like the papal tiara, the symbol of triple authority combined in one person. ... Their chronological age disqualifies children from safeguards which are routine for adults in a modern asylum—madhouse, monastery or jail. ... The distinctions between morality, legality and personal worth are blurred and eventually eliminated. Each transgression is made to be felt as a multiple offence. The offender is expected to feel that he has broken a rule, that he has behaved immorally, and that he has let himself down. ... Classroom attendance removes children from the everyday world of Western culture and plunges them into an environment far more primitive, magical and deadly serious. School could not create such an enclave within which the rules of ordinary reality are suspended, unless it physically incarcerated the young during many successive years on sacred territory.¹²

Illich argued that the attitude of mind engendered by schooling creates a false picture of reality:

School pretends to break learning up into subject ‘matters’, to build into the pupil a curriculum made of these prefabricated blocks, and to gauge the result on an international scale. People who submit to the standard of others for the measurement of their own personal growth soon apply the same ruler to themselves. They no longer have to be put in their place, but put themselves into their assigned slots, squeeze themselves into the niche which they have been taught to seek, and, in the very process, put their fellows in their places, too, until everybody and everything fits.¹³

Illich observed the curious phenomenon that the more taxpayers’ money was spent on compulsory schools, the worse were the academic results these schools achieved. For example, “reading difficulties have been a major issue in French schools only since the *per capita* expenditures have approached US levels of 1950—when reading difficulties became a major issue in US schools.” Illich explained this phenomenon as follows:

[H]ealthy students often redouble their resistance to teaching as they find themselves more comprehensively manipulated. This resistance is due not to the authoritarian style of a public school or the seductive style of some free schools, but to the fundamental approach common to all schools—the idea that one person’s judgement should determine what and when another must learn.¹⁴

A REAL EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Illich argued that a real educational system should

... provide all who want to learn with access to available resources at any time in their lives; empower all who want to share what they know to find those who want to learn it from them; and, finally, furnish all who want to present an issue to the public with the opportunity to make their challenge known. Learners should not be forced to submit to an obligatory curriculum, or to discrimination based on whether they possess a certificate or a diploma. Nor should the public be forced to support, through a regressive taxation, a huge professional apparatus of educators and buildings which in fact restricts the public’s chances for learning to the services the profession is willing to put on the market. It should use modern technology to make free speech, free assembly and a free press truly universal and, therefore, fully educational.¹⁵

For a de-centralised educational network to achieve these goals, Illich went on,

It must not start with the question, “What should someone learn?” but with the question, “What kinds of things and people might learners want to be in contact with in order to learn?”¹⁶

He proposed four different approaches to enable individuals to define and achieve their own educational goals.

The first of these are “reference services to educational objects”. Individuals wishing to learn about any kind of object, whether a geological specimen, a work of art or a technological artefact, should have the opportunity to use and study it at first hand:

If the goals of learning were no longer dominated by schools and schoolteachers, the market for learners would be much more various and the definition of ‘educational artefacts’ would be less restrictive. There could be tool shops, libraries, laboratories and gaming rooms. Photo labs and offset presses would allow neighbourhood newspapers to flourish. Some storefront learning centres could contain viewing booths for closed-circuit television, others could feature office equipment for use and for repair. The jukebox or the record player would be commonplace, with some specializing in classical music, others in international folk tunes, others in jazz. Film clubs would compete with each other and with commercial television. Museum outlets could be networks for circulating exhibits of works of art, both old and new, originals and reproductions, perhaps administered by the various metropolitan museums. The professional personnel needed for this network would be much more like custodians, museum guides or reference librarians than like teachers.¹⁷

Illich argued that such an educational process would allow young people to escape the confines of a single institution and choose from a wide range of educational experiences, including, if they desired it, paid work:

The money now spent on the sacred paraphernalia of the school ritual could be freed to provide all citizens with greater access to the real life of the city. Special tax incentives could be granted to those who employed children between the ages of eight and fourteen for a couple of hours each day if the conditions of employment were humane ones.¹⁸

Second are skill exchanges, which, in the words of Illich,

... permit persons to list their skills, the conditions under which they are willing to serve as models for others who want to learn these skills, and the address at which they can be reached.¹⁹

These exchanges would of course be entirely voluntary, and no certification or licence would be required for any individual to teach skills. Payment, in the form of educational vouchers, would be paid to the possessor of skills by the student.

Third is peer-matching, in which every individual would be free to meet with other individuals to pursue activities of mutual interest.

A good chess player is always glad to find a close match, and one novice to find another. ... People who want to discuss specific books or articles would probably pay to find discussion partners. People who want to play games, go on excursions, build fish tanks or motorize bicycles will go to considerable lengths to find peers. ... The inverse of school would be an institution which increased the chances that persons who at a given moment shared the same specific interest could meet—no matter what else they had in common. ... The operation of a peer-matching network would be simple. The user would identify himself by name and address and describe the activity for which he sought a peer. A computer would send him back the names and addresses of all those who had inserted the same description.²⁰

Illich saw peer-matching as a manifestation of the right to free assembly:

The right of free assembly has been politically recognized and culturally accepted. We should now understand that this right is curtailed by laws that make some forms of assembly obligatory. This is especially the case with institutions which conscript according to age group, class or sex, and which are very time-consuming. The army is one example. School is an even more outrageous one. To deschool means to abolish the power of one person to oblige another person to attend a meeting. It also means recognising the right of any person, of any age or sex, to call a meeting. This right has been drastically diminished by the institutionalization of meetings.²¹

Fourth, deschooling would lead to the appearance of professional educators who would act as advisers, network administrators and pedagogues:

While network administrators would concentrate primarily on the building and maintenance of roads providing access to resources, the pedagogue would help the student to find the path which for him could lead fastest to his goal. If a student wanted to learn spoken Cantonese from a Chinese neighbour, the pedagogue would be available to judge their proficiency, and to help them select the textbook and methods most suitable to their talents, character and the time available for study. He could counsel the would-be aeroplane mechanic on finding the best places for apprenticeship. He could recommend books to somebody who wanted to find challenging peers to discuss African history. Like the network administrator, the pedagogic counsellor would conceive of himself as a professional educator. Access to either could be gained by individuals through the use of educational vouchers.²²

Illich argues that many teachers currently struggling in schools would welcome the opportunity to take on these roles in a deschooled society:

Schoolteachers are overwhelmingly badly paid and frustrated by the tight control of the school system. The most enterprising and gifted among them would probably find more congenial work, more independence and even higher incomes by specializing as skill models, network administrators or guidance specialists.²³

DESCHOOLING THE WORLD

Deschooling attracted a great deal of attention world-wide in the 1960s and early 1970s. Individuals from many countries, walks of life, and philosophical and religious viewpoints who had attended the Cuernavaca seminars, spread the ideas in their own countries. We saw earlier how in the West the education of young people had come under the control of a vast bureaucratic monopoly run by "educationalists" who segregated education from the rest of society and kept outsiders away from its mysterious processes. This institutional model had not yet become dominant in many poorer countries. Perceptive individuals from Africa, Asia and Latin America saw deschooling as a way of developing an educational system from existing non-coercive ways of transmitting knowledge and skills, a process over which no single group within society would gain a monopoly. In Uganda, for example, W. Senteza Kajubi reported that "the school system is regarded by many political and educational leaders as a means of disorientating children from the realities of life as it is" and asked "Is the school an obsolete institution?"²⁴ In 1973 an international conference in Saigon discussed "the no more schools alternative". At the meeting of Commonwealth education ministers in Kingston, Jamaica, in 1974, Dr Ian Lister of York University and J. P. Naik, member-secretary of the Indian Council for Social Science Research, delivered papers on "What kind of educational system? An alternative view". Naik argued that teachers who enjoyed a legalised monopoly on educating the young were a Brahmin-like priest caste of the school religion. He continued:

Any system of formal education has serious limitations. It fails to reach the working population; offers no chance for late or multiple entry; ignores the educative influences of home, society and workplace; tends to produce and perpetuate an elite; encourages conformity rather than healthy dissent; and requires ever-increasing expenditure.²⁵

India was, in fact, a major centre for practical deschooling projects, and these included correspondence courses, functional literacy programmes, the use of satellite instructional television, community development projects and non-formal education for young people aged six to 14. In 1975 an Indian National Conference on Non-formal Education was held in Madras, where plans were made for further educational projects not based on the compulsory schooling model.

In the United States, the impact of deschooling manifested itself in the report of the National Commission on the Reform of Secondary Education (the Brown Report) in 1973. The report urged that "recognition be given to a wide variety of available alternatives" and supported "the development of a wide-ranging system of alternative programmes to give a meaningful freedom of educational choice to every student", mentioning "mobile schools, street academies, action education, academic and vocational apprenticeships, and schools without walls." It agreed that "authentic learning can take place in a wide variety of settings, many of them remote from the schoolhouse," and called for the lowering of the compulsory school-leaving age to 14. It argued for better use of educational television and the creation of media centres where print and non-print materials would be available. The report recommended that the public library should become "the central resource for non-traditional approaches to education".²⁶

However, a central purpose of the report was to preserve the essential nature of the American compulsory school in the face of both its own rapid decline and of the deschooling challenge. In 1973, Mario Fantini, who became known as the "godfather of the alternative school movement", wrote:

Without the development of alternatives within our public schools, our present system of public education is likely to undergo even more serious disturbance.

Fantini quoted his young son with approval as saying "I wish I could choose a school like you choose a gas station."²⁷

In Minneapolis, the Southeast Alternatives Program offered families a choice of different state schools, each one characterised by a different approach, including a conventional school (with a traditional curriculum), a continuous progress school (basic curriculum with options), and a free school (flexible choice of curriculum). Gerald Brunetti of the University of Minnesota commented:

The most important characteristic of the program is that it offers parents and kids and teachers clear choices in terms of the educational environments and curricula they can opt for.

This scheme is certainly an improvement on the way schools are usually run: compare it, for instance, with the despotism the Tories are currently imposing on young people in British state schools. Nonetheless, the danger inherent of such relatively minor concessions in the direction of consumer choice is also highlighted by Brunetti:

[A]lternative schools within the public system merely reinforce archaic patterns in education and co-opt potential forces for change by providing various semi-satisfactory alternatives.²⁸

In Canada, the Report of the Commission on Post-Secondary Education in Ontario (the Wright Report) of 1972 was described by Dr Ian Lister, Britain's most prominent advocate of deschooling, as "the most radical analysis of education and society produced in any post-industrial country".²⁹ The report asked "Whether we wish to allow the trend toward universal and sequential education to continue, or whether we should provide some viable alternatives?" The commission's approach was that education should be person-

centred, serving the needs of the individual, rather than those of future employers, the professions or the institutions themselves. It argued that a wide range of educational services should be available to every individual throughout his or her life. It made the following specific recommendations, among others:

1. The government of Ontario should provide socially useful alternatives to post-secondary education.
2. Alternatives for young adults should be funded as realistically as formal secondary education.
3. Opportunities should be provided for the employment of secondary-school leavers who wish to pursue post-secondary education on a part-time basis.
4. Teachers and administrators who have had non-school work experience relevant to their speciality should be given preference in hiring over those lacking such experience.
5. Structures should be devised, possibly through legislation, for the purpose of investing funds and/or percentages of income to provide for periodic study leave.
6. Where student intake quotas are for the present unavoidable, admission should be determined on the basis of a lottery.
7. Legislation should be enacted to prevent discrimination in employment because of attendance or non-attendance at educational institutions.

The commission's aim was:

... to eradicate the distinction between 'students' and other members of the community, thereby helping to integrate education and society.³⁰

In their response to the Report, the Council of Ontario Universities observed that

The consistent educational philosophy that underlies the Report ... is clearly the philosophy of the new education. ... This philosophy seems to have reached the Commission through Ivan Illich, to whom the Commission is known to be greatly beholden.³¹

The deschooling movement produced a very substantial body of literature, from authors around the world. In Britain, a large number of Penguin Educational Specials were devoted to critiques of compulsory schooling and the examination of alternatives. The definitive scholarly volume on the subject was *Deschooling: A Reader*, edited by Ian Lister, published by the Cambridge University Press in 1974. While I have been unable to locate a copy of this book, which has been out of print for many years, I understand that it contains contributions by a range of academic figures examining various aspects of the subject, along with others by orthodox "educationalists" criticising deschooling and defending the practice of compelling young people to attend conventional schools.

THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the deschooling movement was seen by orthodox "educationalists" in the West as being about as threatening—indeed, as amusing—as the protestations of the minuscule Gulliver appeared to the king of Brobdingnag. For several years, "educationalists" tried to absorb deschooling ideas into their empire, and thus neutralise their challenge. As Lister explains:

Deschooling argued for structural changes, and there were many ways of failing to achieve them: by being co-opted as add-on alternatives (the conservative pluralist approach) or by being made into fringe activities, operating at the periphery of the system. A further danger lay in encouraging the growth of alternative bureaucracies: "Who will run these alternatives?" smart Indian bureaucrats asked me, doubtless seeing the chance of jobs for relatives. The ideas of

deschooling could also become defused and diffuse through being accommodated by the institutions, for example making *School is Dead* [by Everett Reimer] compulsory reading on the student's book list and deschooling into fodder for courses, essays and doctoral theses—this educational development becomes career development. Some institutions ritualised and contained deschooling by organising 'alternative education conferences' once a year, similar to the role reversals by which officers in the armed forces serve men lunch on Christmas day—a celebration of the hold enjoyed by the dominant group. The biggest danger to deschooling has always been that it would not get beyond its early prophets ... and that it would generate only an alternative rhetoric. This is too often the fate of good reformers who lack power and political skills, and fail to create alternative practice—i.e. alternative realities to match its alternative visions.³²

In the mid-1970s, quite quickly, the realisation came, even to orthodox "educationalists", that the system of compulsory schooling was in severe trouble. The level of "educational attainment"—as measured by the standards of central planning—were falling drastically just as the level of per pupil expenditure increased to record levels. Not only had the expansion of taxpayer-financed schools and universities not brought the expected economic development, but a growing proportion of university graduates were finding themselves both unemployed and unemployable. Suddenly all those people who were arguing for such eccentric ideas as the abolition of compulsory schooling, the transfer of financial resources from the "educational" bureaucracy to the individual, and for the right of anybody to teach and learn from anybody else, didn't seem quite so funny any more.

So the "educational" mafia closed ranks. Publishers stopped producing new books on deschooling, and existing ones disappeared from university reading lists and went out of print. Conferences on educational alternatives no longer took place. Articles about deschooling stopped appearing in both the "educational" press and the mass media.

The definition of "education" was restricted to what happened in the compulsory school under an imposed curriculum under the control of a teacher who exercised a professional monopoly. Anything which did not fit that definition was simply not education, and therefore could not be considered or discussed by educationalists. What the "educationalists" did in relation to education is similar to what the Marxists did in sociology. I am reminded of Professor Malcolm Bradbury's novel *The History Man*, about the activities of Dr Howard Kirk, an unscrupulous Marxist lecturer in sociology. In one incident, Kirk confronts George Carmody, a conservative student whom he intends to ensure fails his degree. Carmody asks to be transferred to another teacher; Kirk refuses, and informs him that the poor marks he has given him are because of his "un-sociological" view of reality:

'Look, Dr Kirk,' says Carmody, 'I can't ever satisfy you, I can't ever be radical enough to suit you. I have beliefs and convictions, like you. Why can't you give me a chance?'

'And what are these beliefs and convictions?' asks Howard. 'I happen to believe in individualism, not collectivism. I hate this cost-accountancy, Marxist view of man as a unit in the chain of production. I believe that the superstructure is a damned sight more important than the substructure. I think culture's a value, not an inert descriptive term.'

'Beliefs, in short, incompatible with sociological analysis,' says Howard. 'I'm not moving you. You either accept some sociological principles, or you fail, and that's your choice.'³³

In the case of deschooling, however, socialist and conservative "educationalists" joined forces to define anything which took place outside the compulsory school as incompatible with educational analysis. As a result, discussions of deschooling disappeared from the press and broadcasting as well. Broadcast discussions about "education" became "balanced" between a socialist "educa-

tionalist” who took compulsory schooling for granted and a conservative “educationalist” who took compulsory schooling for granted. Thus deschooling no longer existed as far as the general public was concerned. It is often said that we live in a “mediarich” society, and some assume that this makes more ideas available to the public that would otherwise be the case. In fact, the opposite is true. Precisely because the media, and particularly television, is so all-pervasive, it tends to give reality only to those ideas and issues with which it continuously presents the public. Those ideas and issues which disappear from the media also disappear with remarkable speed from public consciousness.

Thus was deschooling shoved down the memory-hole described in George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Since the mid-1970s, the situation in the schools has become ever more catastrophic, while the debate on what to do about them has been ever more restricted. To my knowledge, the physicist Dr David Deutsch, of the Mathematics Institute of Oxford University, is the only academic in Britain who advocates a policy that can be accurately described as deschooling. Dr Deutsch has called for “apprenticeships in physics” in which young people would be free to work with physicists in their everyday activities, and thus gain first-hand knowledge of scientific practices. I hope that even Cantabrians such as yourselves will join me in hoping that in this instance, at least, Oxford will overcome its reputation as the home of lost causes.

CONSERVATIVE CENTRAL PLANNING

In the 1980s—though certainly not today—we heard a great deal from the Conservative government about how industries should be owned privately, rather than by the state; about how individuals should be granted freedom in their economic activities; and about how the restrictions imposed by bureaucracy, high taxation, inflation and trade unions operating outside the rule of law should be brought to an end. Individuals, we were told, should enjoy freedom to trade with one another by voluntary contract, and not as a result of the decrees of Whitehall bureaucrats governing economic targets, prices and wages. One would have thought it an obvious corollary of such economic views that in education, too, every individual should be free to learn from and teach every other individual, with no necessity for compulsion, a professional teaching monopoly, or state ownership.

Unfortunately, this is not quite the way the Tory mind operates. Instead, the Conservative government has set up a National Curriculum Council which sits in Whitehall and decrees, with the force of law, the exact learning agenda of every young person in every state school in the country. Surely it takes a Conservative education secretary to still believe that the central government planning of the activities of millions of different individuals will produce anything other than a disaster. A group of Fabian wags once produced a book entitled *The Intellectual Case for Toryism*, which consisted of some 200 blank pages. Looking at Conservative education policy, one knows exactly how they felt.

We all know about the Conservative Party. What is of rather more concern is that the publications of such bodies as the Institute of Economic Affairs and the Adam Smith Institute—whom nobody could accuse of intellectual timidity—take for granted that education should take place in state-owned compulsory schools, under an imposed curriculum and professional-monopoly teachers, and argue simply for a variety of modifications to that system. The authors of these publications are, of course, entitled to express their views, just as libertarians are entitled to challenge them. But does it not also behove these admirable organisations to examine how the insights of classical liberalism can be brought to bear on education, just as they have been implemented so successfully in economics?

For in reading the works of the deschooling movement, one is repeatedly struck by how close its analysis is to those of the various bodies of ideas which are characterised as free-market thinking. With no claims to being definitive, let us examine how some of these insights might strengthen the case for deschooling.

THE TOTALITY OF HUMAN KNOWLEDGE

School denies the individual access to vast areas of human knowledge, those areas that can only be acquired by practical experience in the real world, and not in any classroom or from any book. Many of the greatest minds in history have recognised that purely academic and theoretical learning is only a very small part of the totality of human knowledge.

In Voltaire’s masterpiece, *Candide* has been convinced by his teacher, the learned Dr Pangloss, a proponent of the philosophy of “métaphysico-théologo-cosmolo-nigologie”, that all is for the best in this best of all possible worlds. As *Candide* and Pangloss encounter catastrophe after catastrophe in the real world, Pangloss has to resort to extraordinary intellectual gymnastics in his attempts to integrate these events into his world-view and rationalise his philosophical beliefs.

Byron also recognises that

Sorrow is knowledge: those who know the most
Must mourn the deepest o’er the fatal truth—
The Tree of Knowledge is not that of Life.³⁴

And the late Professor F. A. Hayek wrote, in the context of a critique of central economic planning:

[T]here is beyond question a body of very important but unorganized knowledge which cannot possibly be called scientific in the sense of knowledge of general rules: the knowledge of the particular circumstances of time and place. It is with respect to this that practically every individual has some advantage over all others because he possesses unique information of which beneficial use might be made only if the decisions depending on it are left to him or are made with his active co-operation.

We need only to remember how much we have to learn in any occupation after we have completed our theoretical training, how big a part of our working life we spend learning particular jobs, and how valuable an asset in all walks of life is knowledge of people, of local conditions, and of special circumstances. To know of and put to use a machine not fully employed, or somebody’s skill which could be better utilized, or to be aware of a surplus stock which can be drawn upon during an interruption of supplies, is socially quite as useful as the knowledge of better alternative techniques. The shipper who earns his living from using otherwise empty or half-filled journeys of tramp-steamers, or the estate agent whose whole knowledge is almost exclusively one of temporary opportunities, or the *arbitrageur* who gains from local differences of commodity prices—all are performing eminently useful functions based on special knowledge of circumstances of the fleeting moment not known to others.

It is a curious fact that this sort of knowledge should today be generally regarded with a kind of contempt, that anybody who, by such knowledge, gains an advantage over somebody better equipped with theoretical or technical knowledge is thought to have acted almost disreputably. To gain an advantage from better knowledge of facilities of communication or transport is sometimes regarded as almost dishonest, although it is quite as important that society make use of the best opportunities in this respect as in using the latest scientific discoveries.³⁵

Economists talk also about “human capital”, by which they mean certain skills and abilities which some individuals have, which enable them to achieve financial success in the real world. This form of knowledge can, in fact, largely be acquired by individuals who wish to acquire it, from those individuals who possess it. But one must understand the nature of this knowledge. Not only is it very different from academic learning, but in many individuals academic learning can be a positive hindrance to acquiring and using it. Many of Britain’s most successful business people have almost no formal schooling. Donald Kirkham, chairman of the Woolwich

Building Society, left technical college at 16 with a “clear notion that the more I learned, the less I knew”.³⁶ Richard Branson left Stowe at 16, and prefers to employ staff without formal education. Sir Maurice Laing, president of the construction firm John Laing, left St Lawrence College at 17 to join the family business. “I hated school, am rebellious by nature and dislike being told what to do by damn fools”, he says.³⁷ Many of the giants of American enterprise, including Averell Harriman, Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller and Sam Goldwyn, were comparative illiterates. According to the distinguished economist Lord Bauer, “Education is clearly not necessary for the creation of a prosperous, capitalist society.” He cites the example of south-east Asia: “In the early 20th century millions of illiterate Chinese coolies migrated there. They transformed the whole region and made it prosper, outdistancing the indigenous population and the other, better-educated immigrant groups.”³⁸ Perhaps the greatest illusion in the Western world over the past 150 years has been that by subjecting young people to academic learning for ever longer periods, and preventing them from acquiring economic knowledge in the real world, national economic development will be promoted. In the Hindu pantheon, by contrast, the goddess of learning and the goddess of wealth are constantly in dispute.

VALUING REAL-WORLD KNOWLEDGE

An educational free market would recognise the value of the knowledge which these people have, and seek ways of enabling young people to take advantage of it. One could envisage schemes in which companies would open their doors to young people (including those under the age of 16) interested in learning what goes on in various industries and professions, and provide them with both experience of the everyday activities of the firm, and with professional training from the staff. Other schemes might enable young people to become “shadows” for a period of months to successful figures in various fields in which they are interested, who could include entrepreneurs, inventors, musicians, soccer players or fashion designers.

One can imagine each young person experiencing half a dozen such schemes, and thus gaining a trove of invaluable knowledge. Yet the state, in the process of supposedly preparing young people for life in the world outside that of formal schooling, forces young people to learn only from the one group of adults which has least knowledge about that world. The overwhelming majority of teachers have been through school, followed by university, followed by teacher-training college, and then back to school again as teachers. And these people have a legally-enforced professional monopoly of teaching young people about the world outside schools. Under our present system young people are supposed to piously avert their eyes from any practical or useful knowledge or experience which is of financial value in the real world. Is it any wonder that so many young people, having left school or university, appear so ill-equipped for success in that world? We hear a great deal about the “underclass”, the growing proportion of the population which is dependent on state welfare, caught in the poverty trap, and seemingly incapable of financial survival in the real world. Compulsory schooling has greatly aggravated this situation by forcibly preventing young people from acquiring the specialised skills and knowledge which they can exchange for cash. The smaller the number of individuals with the knowledge of how to perform a given skill which is in demand, the greater the amount of money those individuals can obtain for performing it. When a certain body of knowledge is shared by millions, it becomes financially worthless. Because the state forces all young people in its schools to learn the same curriculum, young people leaving school know only what millions of others also know, and have been prevented both from developing their unique talents in their own way and from learning those very specialised skills for which businesses are willing to pay good money.

And it is not just among the poorest of the poor that financial ignorance is widespread. Several years ago, before the current recession, an article appeared about people in Telford, Shropshire, which was then considered “the debt capital of the UK”. These

people were in danger of losing the homes they owned as a result of having taken high-interest loans from finance companies, putting up their houses as collateral. One individual told the reporter that his house was not at risk because he had taken on a “secured loan”—secured on his house, of course. A second interviewee noted that the finance company put “APR 26%” at the head of all its letters, and wondered why it was dating all its letters April 26th in the middle of October. A third thought that the initials APR stood for Association of People’s Rights, and that no misfortune could possibly overcome him, because he was protected by this organisation.

The “education” these Candies in Telford have undergone in schools prevents them from gaining the areas of knowledge which every individual (except perhaps those who have inherited vast wealth) needs in order to survive—let alone succeed—in a world in which, to cite the Yorkshire proverb, “You get nowt for nowt and precious little for sixpence”. Free-market economists criticise their statist colleagues for “priceless” economics, that is, economics which largely leaves out consideration of prices. How much more is left out in a “priceless education” which fails to consider the pervasive factor of prices in adult life. In the same essay to which I referred earlier, Hayek continues:

In a competitive industry at any rate—and such an industry alone can serve as a test—the task of keeping costs from rising requires constant struggle, absorbing a great part of the energy of the manager. How easy it is for an inefficient manager to dissipate the differentials on which profitability rests. A great variety in costs of production, even when using the same technical facilities, is commonplace in business experience but does not seem to be equally familiar to many economists. The very strength of the desire, constantly voiced by producers and engineers, to be allowed to proceed untrammelled by considerations of money costs, is eloquent testimony to the extent to which these factors enter into their daily work.³⁹

YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS

Young people must have the opportunity to learn, from the individuals best able to inform them about them, such dreadfully gauche subjects as how to get the best deal with mortgages, banking, insurance and investments, about business structures and methods, about how to minimise tax liability, about how money is made in the real world. There is no reason why young people should not become entrepreneurs themselves: Mark Harries, the famous child prodigy who showed an astonishing talent for finding valuable gold and antiques at jumble sales, opened his own antique shop at the age of 10, wrote a book about his success at the age of 11, and then, as a seasoned veteran of 12, opened a florist’s as well. Let young people who wish to do so set up in business, and let them use some of their educational vouchers to acquire the knowledge and professional advice they require. It may be objected that many of these businesses would fail. Even if that is true, all other things being equal, which of two 16-year-olds is more likely to achieve long-term financial success in the real world: one who has been running a business in the real world for two or three years, or one who has been stuck in the classroom studying the National Curriculum?

The assumption which underlies our present schooling system is that knowledge about, and ability to succeed in, the world of commercial activity is something loathsome and contaminating to the individual. Young people must be prevented by law from gaining first-hand knowledge about that world, and must instead be compulsorily segregated in institutions where they are taught a curriculum consisting exclusively of academic knowledge.

Libertarians, I suggest, cannot accept this assumption. Rather we should value the voluntary acquisition of practical experience, knowledge and skills as something which enhances the powers and the dignity of the individual. Even Karl Marx, in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, opposed the demand for the prohibition of child labour on the grounds that it would restrict the educa-

tional opportunities of the young. One problem is that mention of young people being permitted to gain real-world experience conjures up images of impoverished Victorian waifs going up chimneys or down mines for twelve hours a day. Yet many young people worked harder, under even worse conditions, and often without wages, in the centuries before the advent of modern capitalism, and it is precisely the wealth created by capitalism which has freed young people from a situation where they have to do those sorts of jobs out of economic necessity. Nineteenth-century laws prohibiting “child labour”, and enforcing school attendance, have had the effect of preventing young people aged, say, 12, 13, or 14, from obtaining professional skills and experience in fields which interest them, which could range from electronics to sports management to fashion design. The compulsory school creates an entirely artificial and false dichotomy between the approved “academic” and the forbidden “practical” education. Young people should instead have freedom to access the totality of human knowledge, including those areas which encompass the application of the human mind to the material world. One need not necessarily share all the opinions of Ayn Rand to accept her recognition of the rational, productive and creative nature of the mind, its central role in linking the individual with the universe, and its capacity to effect beneficial change on the material world. One need not necessarily share the religious outlook of that most Roman Catholic of English Victorian poets, Gerard Manley Hopkins, to join with him in celebrating the manifestations of this ability as one of the wonders of nature, noting particularly the two words on which he places emphasis:

Glory be to God for dappled things—
 For skies of couple-colour as a brindled cow;
 For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
 Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches’ wings;
 Landscape plotted and pieced—fold, fallow, and plough;
 And áll trádes, their gear and tackle and trim.⁴⁰

SCHOOL “SCIENCE” VERSUS REAL SCIENCE

Defenders of compulsory schooling would presumably argue that all young people, whether they want it or not, must have certain areas of “academic knowledge”—the content of which is decided by the state—forced upon them. Yet the manner in which such “knowledge” is imposed negates most of the educational value it would otherwise have had. The problem is highlighted by the famous “monkey trial” held in Dayton, Tennessee, in 1925. At that time, the laws of the state of Tennessee stipulated that the Babylonian creation-myth which begins the Book of Genesis was to be taught as the scientific account of the origin of life to young people in public schools. John T. Scopes, a public-school teacher, was prosecuted, convicted and fined for teaching instead the Darwinian theory that life originated spontaneously in the “primordial soup” of earth three billion years ago, and subsequently evolved via random mutation and natural selection (although the conviction was later reversed on a legal technicality). Since that time, so-called “liberals” in the United States have made a point of ensuring that the conventional Darwinian account—and that alone—is taught as “Scientific Truth” to every young person in every public school in the country.

Yet the adoption of an official government “line” on scientific questions, which is then imposed on young people by force, contradicts the fundamental nature of science and the process by which scientific knowledge is acquired. On the question of the origin of life, most scientists do indeed accept the current neo-Darwinian theory, as put forward, for example, by Dr Richard Dawkins. However, Sir Fred Hoyle and Professor N. C. Wickramasinghe, two of the world’s most distinguished scientists, claim instead that life first came to earth in comets from outer space. They argue that biochemicals formed in the gaseous outpouring from the hot luminous surface of stars, entered interstellar clouds of gas and dust, and that this organic material was carried in comets to the earth, thus bringing life to this planet. They have also written a book arguing that the famous fossil *Archaeopteryx*, which contains characteristics of both reptile and bird, is a hoax

similar to that perpetrated by the creators of “Piltdown Man”. Their case is certainly plausible: some classes of meteorite do contain fossilised assemblages of organic material, and the earth’s water and many other constituents of its surface layers came from comets. They also present a strong argument that the interior of a cometary nucleus, which would be warm but protected from extremes of heat, would be a more favourable environment for the origin of life than was the “chemical soup” of the primitive earth.

My personal opinion, as a reader of newspaper articles and popular science books, is that the conventional Darwinian theory of the origin of life is rather more probable than the views of Sir Fred and Professor Wickramasinghe. Yet does this give me, perhaps brandishing my O-levels in science subjects, the right to impose my opinion at the point of a gun on millions of young people incarcerated in schools? On the contrary, the very fact that two such distinguished scientists hold views so different from the mainstream is a manifestation of the fundamental characteristic of scientific knowledge—falsifiability—as identified by the most distinguished living philosopher of science, Sir Karl Popper:

Science is not a system of certain or well-established, statements; nor is it a system which steadily advances towards a state of finality. Our science is not knowledge (*episteme*): it can never claim to have attained truth, or even a substitute for it, such as probability. ...

We do not know: we can only guess. And our guesses are guided by the unscientific, the metaphysical (though biologically explicable) faith in laws, in regularities which we can uncover—discover. Like Bacon, we might describe our own contemporary science—“the method of reasoning which men now ordinarily apply to nature”—as consisting of “anticipations, rash and premature” and of “prejudices”. But these marvellously imaginative and bold conjectures or “anticipations” of ours are carefully and soberly controlled by systematic tests. Once put forward, none of our “anticipations” are dogmatically upheld. Our method of research is not to defend them, in order to prove how right we were. On the contrary, we try to overthrow them. Using all the weapons of our logical, mathematical, and technical armoury, we try to prove that our anticipations were false—in order to put forward, in their stead, new unjustified and unjustifiable anticipations, new “rash and premature prejudices”, as Bacon derisively called them. ...

Bold ideas, unjustified anticipations, and speculative thought, are our only means for interpreting nature: our only organon, our only instrument, for grasping her. And we must hazard them to win our prize. Those among us who are unwilling to expose their ideas to the hazard of refutation do not take part in the scientific game. ...

The old scientific ideal of *episteme*—of absolutely certain, demonstrable knowledge—has proved to be an idol. The demand for scientific objectivity makes it inevitable that every scientific statement must remain *tentative for ever*. It may indeed be corroborated, but every corroboration is relative to other statements which, again, are tentative. ...

With the idol of certainty (including that of degrees of imperfect certainty or probability) there falls one of the defences of obscurantism which bar the way of scientific advance. For the worship of this idol hampers not only the boldness of our questions, but also the rigour and the integrity of our tests. The wrong view of science betrays itself in the craving to be right; for it is not his *possession* of knowledge, of irrefutable truth, that makes the man of science, but his persistent and recklessly critical *quest* for truth.⁴¹

Clearly, then, for the state to adopt an “official line” on the origin of life, and to impose that “scientific” line by compulsion on young people is to perpetrate a superstition as false as to forcibly impose on them a different line based on supernatural beliefs. Let us instead encourage open minds. Let us not forget, for example, that there are far more books about human fossils than there are

human fossils themselves. If the Darwinian theory of evolution is the state's official line on the origin of life, will we one day see a "comet trial" of a teacher who attempts to expound the Hoyle-Wickramasinge thesis to pupils in a state school?

LYSENKO

The danger of allowing the state to adopt and enforce official lines on scientific questions was graphically demonstrated by the career of the notorious fraud Trofim Lysenko in the Soviet Union. Lysenko was an agricultural "scientist" who from the 1920s onwards promoted Lamarck's idea that an organism could pass on to its offspring characteristics acquired during its lifetime, thus contradicting both Darwinism and Mendelian genetics, which demonstrate that such changes occur as a result of random genetic mutation. Although the Lamarckian theory had long been discredited among scientists, Lysenko's views were seen to be "politically correct" by the communist regime. Under both Stalin and Khrushchev, Lysenko and his followers were promoted to the highest positions in Soviet science. Lysenkoism became the approved Marxist-Leninist "Scientific Truth": those scientists courageous or foolhardy enough to question any part of it were designated as "class enemies" and—often along with their colleagues—arrested, banished and imprisoned.

If the repudiation of the conception of science as the result of free inquiry by free minds leads to such appalling consequences, surely the education of young people must itself reflect the true nature of science. At present, a Whitehall committee prescribes, through the National Curriculum, not only the areas of science which young people in compulsory schools will study, but also—in true Lysenkoite fashion—what conclusions they will come to as a result of that study. Instead, let us allow young people access to the tools of real science—to laboratories, equipment and scientists themselves—and to follow their own interests. Let them learn directly from scientists, and from research students, what science is all about. Such a transformation of scientific education will have the most enormous benefits. Those young people who will pursue scientific careers as adults will obtain first-hand understanding of the work they are to perform right from the start. Others will gain an insight into science as it really is, rather than obtaining the impression given in schools that it is something imposed "from above" by an elite on everyone else. This would diminish the hostility and fear of science that a substantial proportion of the public appears to have, if one believes public opinion polls on the subject.

Sir Karl himself recognises the value of learning science as it really is, rather than in the distorted image given to young people in an imposed curriculum:

Only if the student experiences how easy it is to err, and how hard to make even a small advance in the field of knowledge, only then can he obtain a feeling for the standards of intellectual honesty, a respect for truth, and a disregard of authority and bumptiousness. But nothing is more necessary to-day than the spread of these modest intellectual virtues. "The mental power," T. H. Huxley wrote in *A Liberal Education*, "which will be of most importance in your ... life will be the power of seeing things as they are without regard to authority. ... But at school and at college, you shall know of no source of truth but authority." I admit that, unfortunately, this is true also of many courses in science, which by some teachers is still treated as if it was a "body of knowledge", as the ancient phrase goes. But this idea is about to disappear, and science can be taught as a quickly developing growth of bold hypotheses, controlled by experiment, and by criticism. Taught in this way, it could become the basis of a new liberal University education, whose aim, where it cannot produce experts, will be to produce at least men *who can distinguish between a charlatan and an expert*.⁴²

Here Popper comes to the central issue in education, and not just at university level. For preventing the emergence of informed, independent and critical thinkers is precisely the main reason why

the state creates compulsory schooling, and decrees what may and may not be taught there. In schools, just enough "knowledge" is taught, and in just such a way, as to make the individual aware of his or her ignorance and inferiority towards the supposed "experts" whom the state puts in charge of his or her life. It is doubtful, indeed, whether any society in history has ever contained more individuals, from cabinet ministers downwards, in Britain today, who would quake in terror at the prospect of millions of young people learning to distinguish a charlatan from an expert.

SHAKESPEARE

And if intellectual freedom is an inherent part of learning science, it is equally important in the arts. George Bernard Shaw once wrote something to the effect that the worst thing about being a playwright is the prospect that the study of one's plays may be imposed on generations of unwilling schoolchildren, who would thus be put off them for life. One shudders to think what will happen to the reputation of Shakespeare now that the National Curriculum Council has made compulsory the study of three of his plays. No more effective way could be found of killing off interest in the Bard than by taking these plays from their appropriate context—the theatre—and making people study their texts line by line, as words on the printed page. Shakespeare was a man of the theatre, and his plays truly come to life only on the stage. He knew the actor's power to establish a rapport with the audience, to control its every emotion by nuances of word, tone of voice, gesture, movement and expression. The central purpose of Shakespeare's text is to provide the actor with the material from which to construct such a performance, and the purely literary aspect of the plays is secondary in importance to this purpose. Let young people, then, appreciate Shakespeare within the context of the dramatic arts as a whole. Let them learn about the fundamentals of stage craft from actors, directors, designers, costumiers and lighting technicians in real theatres, and learn to actually produce and perform the plays of Shakespeare and other great dramatists in this environment. Quite apart from the greatly enhanced understanding and enjoyment of the theatre that would result among young people, the adoption of such educational roles would do a great deal to alleviate the problem of unemployment in the dramatic professions.

The purpose of the teaching of "history" in compulsory schools is, and has always been, to shape young people's ideas about the past in the form approved of by the dominant political power, as a means of making them think the way the government wants them to think. The state decides what myths it wishes to instil in the minds of the young, and selects that historical "evidence" which supports the conclusions it wishes to impose. Any facts which do not support those conclusions are omitted from the syllabus. Again it is to Popper whom we turn for an understanding of this phenomenon:

How do most people come to use the term 'history'? They learn about it in school and at the University. They read books about it. They see what is treated in the books under the name "history of the world" or "the history of mankind", and they get used to looking upon it as a more or less definite series of facts. And these facts constitute, they believe, the history of mankind.

But ... the realm of facts is infinitely rich, and there must be selection. According to our interests, we could, for instance, write a history of art; or of language; or of feeding habits; or of typhus fever (see Zinsser's *Rats, Lice, and History*). Certainly, none of these is the history of mankind (nor all of them taken together). What people have in mind, when they speak of the history of mankind, is rather the history of the Egyptian, Babylonian, Persian, Macedonian, and Roman empires, and so on, down to our own day. In other words: They speak about a history of mankind, but what they mean, and what they have learned about in school, is the history of political power.

There is no history of mankind, there are only many histories of all kinds of aspects of human life. And one of these is the history of political power. This is elevated into the history of the world. But this, I hold, is an offence against every decent conception of mankind. It is hardly better than to treat the history of embezzlement or of robbery or of poisoning as the history of mankind; for the history of power politics is nothing but the history of international crime and mass murder (including, it is true, some of the attempts to suppress them). This history is taught in schools, and many of the greatest criminals are presented as heroes. ...

But why has just the history of power been selected, and not, for example, that of poetry? There are several reasons. One is that power affects us all, and poetry only a few. Another is that men are inclined to worship power. But there can be no doubt that the worship of power is one of the worst kinds of human idolatries, a relic of the time of the cage, of human servitude. The worship of power is born of fear, an emotion which is rightly despised. A third reason why power politics has been made the core of 'history' is that those in power wanted to be worshipped and could enforce their wishes. Many historians wrote under the supervision of the generals and the dictators.⁴³

"HISTORY" TEACHING AS STATE INDOCTRINATION

In 1922, Bertrand Russell described some of the consequences of this propaganda masquerading as "history" in the following passage:

Elementary education, in all advanced countries, is in the hands of the State. Some of the things taught are known to be false by the officials who prescribe them, and many others are known to be false, or at any rate very doubtful, by every unprejudiced person. Take, for example, the teaching of history. Each nation aims only at self-glorification in the school textbooks of history. When a man writes his autobiography he is expected to show a certain modesty; but when a nation writes its autobiography there is no limit to its boasting and vainglory. When I was young, school-books taught that the French were wicked and the Germans virtuous; now they teach the opposite. In neither case is there the slightest regard for truth. German school-books, dealing with the battle of Waterloo, represent Wellington as all but defeated when Blücher saved the situation; English books represent Blücher as having made very little difference. The writers of both the German and the English books know that they are not telling the truth. American school-books used to be violently anti-British; since the [first world] war they have become equally pro-British, without aiming at truth in either case. Both before and since, one of the chief purposes of education in the United States has been to turn the motley collection of immigrant children into 'good Americans'. Apparently it has not occurred to anyone that a 'good American', like a 'good German', or a 'good Japanese', must be, *pro tanto*, a bad human being. A 'good American' is a man or woman imbued with the belief that America is the finest country on earth, and ought always to be enthusiastically supported in any quarrel. It is just possible that these propositions are true; if so, a rational man will have no quarrel with them. But if they are true, they ought to be taught everywhere, not only in America. It is a suspicious circumstance that such propositions are never believed outside the particular country which they glorify. Meanwhile the whole machinery of the State, in all the different countries, is turned on to making defenceless children believe absurd propositions, the effect of which is to make them willing to die in defence of sinister interests under the impression that they are fighting for truth and right. This is only one of the countless ways in which education is designed, not to give true knowledge, but to make the people pliable to the will of their masters. Without an elaborate system of deceit in the

elementary schools it would be impossible to preserve the camouflage of democracy.⁴⁴

What they teach young people in American state schools has changed a bit over the past 70 years. For example, the curriculum guide for 11th-grade history in New York state tells students that the *Haudenosaunee* political system of the Iroquois Indians was the inspiration for both the French Enlightenment and the United States Constitution. Those who oppose the fantasies promulgated in the United States in the name of "political correctness" must recognise that falsehood is inherent in the very nature of a state-imposed compulsory curriculum. Intellectual freedom precludes the power of the state either to set the parameters for the study of history, or to decree the conclusions to which the individual will come as a result of historical study. Instead, let young people have access to the resources, archives and individuals which will enable them to pursue their own historical interests and come to their own conclusions, whether or not those conclusions make life comfortable for those who exercise political power. And of course in an educational free market nobody would be compelled to engage in such an intellectual search for truth, any more than they would be forced to learn how to super-charge a Formula One racing-car engine, how to run a successful nightclub, or how to make a killing on the futures market, which are all areas of knowledge which young people may choose to acquire as an alternative, or addition, to poring over historical documents.

IMPOSED CHRISTIANITY

Then we have religious teaching in state schools. In its wisdom, the National Curriculum Council has decided not only that the claims of Christianity are true, and must be taught as fact in compulsory "religious education" lessons, but also that an act of Christian worship must begin every day at every state school in the country. One can only speculate as to what has led the members of that august body to the certainty which they are so keen to force upon young people. Have they, on the basis of rational and empirical study, come to the conclusion that a particular set of Christian doctrines can be rationally proven? If so, then the theologians and philosophers would both be very interested in hearing about the scholarly discussions which led to these conclusions. If not, they must necessarily argue that the claims of Christianity must be taken on faith, in spite of the fact that they collapse when they are subjected to the scrutiny of philosophy, science and history.

And surely the members of the Council, who presumably ought to enlighten us as to which particular version of Christianity, out of the hundreds of contradictory ones which have existed over the past two millennia, is the one true faith which enjoys divine favour. Are we to believe, for example, those fundamentalists who believe that every word of the Bible is the literal truth, including the notorious whopper in Joshua 10:12,13 in which God stops the sun for a whole day to allow Joshua's army to complete the slaughter of the Amorites? Or are we to believe that indefatigable debunker of supersition, His Grace the Bishop of Durham, when he tells us that even the virgin birth and the resurrection are historical falsehoods? Yet the National Curriculum gives us no definitive answer, and simply states that Christianity in general is to be taught to young people in schools. Each pupil is presumably to be permitted to select the version of Christianity in which he or she believes. Yet any philosophical and ethical system which repudiates the fundamental principles of Christianity is necessarily excluded from what is taught to the young in schools.

SELECTIVE "FREE THOUGHT"

Free thought organisations such as the Rationalist Press Association, the British Humanist Association and the National Secular Society, take a rather peculiar view on education. They argue for the abolition of religious teaching in state schools on the grounds that it is intolerable for the state to impose a particular religious doctrine on young people. Instead, they argue, every young person should be free to come to his or her own conclusions about religion and philosophy on the basis of free inquiry. Every libertarian will surely agree with them on that. Yet these organisations ex-

press no objection to compulsory schooling itself, or an imposed curriculum in areas other than religion. Surely, according to the same argument, young people should enjoy intellectual freedom in all areas of their education. How can one possibly demand free thought in questions of religion and philosophy while accepting state-imposed dogmas and obscurantism in history, science, economics, and every other field of knowledge? Again we come to the function of compulsory schooling as a means of producing individuals who accept what the state tells them without thinking, a function to which both religious and secular teaching is directed. As most Christians will admit, the claims of Christianity have to be accepted on faith, and in English schools they have to be accepted under threat of force. It is exactly the same with the other assertions which are imposed on young people in schools. As Bertrand Russell recognised:

The conviction that it is important to believe this or that, even if a free inquiry would not support the belief, is one which is common to almost all religions and which inspires all systems of State education. The consequence is that the minds of the young are stunted and are filled with fanatical hostility both to those who have other fanaticisms, and, even more virulently, to those who object to all fanaticisms. A habit of basing convictions upon evidence, and of giving to them only the degree of certainty which the evidence warrants, would, if it became general, cure most of the ills from which the world is suffering. But at present, in most countries, education aims at preventing the growth of such a habit, and men who refuse to profess belief in some system of unfounded dogmas are not considered suitable as teachers of the young.⁴⁵

In the nearly 20 years since discussion of deschooling was terminated by the “educationalists”, several developments have occurred which enormously strengthen the potential for the construction of voluntary educational networks of the sort advocated by Illich and his colleagues. In economics, every system of central planning, of nationalisation, of “mixed-economy” corporatism, of “demand management”, of “prices and incomes policies”, and other grandiose schemes for the control of the many by the few, has come crashing down in exactly the way the Austrian economists predicted they would many decades ago. The arguments for the voluntary exchange of goods and services by individuals, free from state control, have become influential, if by no means dominant, almost everywhere, both intellectually and at the level of policy. Education is the major exception.

GRENADA

The only example I know of in the past 15 years where a real attempt has been made to move away from the model of universal compulsory schooling was, ironically, under a Marxist regime: that of Maurice Bishop in Grenada. In 1979, shortly after coming to power, Bishop told the National Education Conference:

We must use the educational system and process as a means of preparing the new man for the new life in the new society we are trying to build.⁴⁶

No libertarian would disagree with those sentiments, but the methods used by the regime owed more to the free market than to Marxism. The adult illiteracy rate in Grenada was more than 30 per cent, and this was recognised as having been the result of the failures of compulsory schooling. Under the slogan “Each one teach one”, the regime arranged for individuals from every walk of life to teach illiterate people to read and write. Under the slogan “If you know, teach; if you don’t, learn”, the regime encouraged the exchange of knowledge and skills by every individual in society, by-passing the schools and the professional teaching monopoly. Under the Community-School Day Program, on one school day out of every five, schoolchildren would go on field trips to such places as fruit-packing plants and brick factories, where they learned about and participated in the work of each establishment. The aim was officially to give young people a greater respect for

the work of the proletariat and give the community an increased role in educating young people. According to an official report,

Exposure to this range of skills at such an early age obviously facilitates the students’ choices of careers later in life, as much as it also enables them to understand more fully their own roles in nation building and the revolution.⁴⁷

These educational programmes were, of course, politically controlled by members of the ruling New Jewel Movement in order to keep them within approved limits. But the point is that just as Lenin, under the New Economic Policy of 1921, introduced a major shift towards a market economy as a means of achieving economic recovery after the disaster of war communism, so too did Bishop realise the need to access all the latent educational resources in society in order to overcome the disaster of universal compulsory schooling. In the supposedly “free societies” of the West, even the such limited educational reforms would doubtless be dismissed as “politically impossible”.

THE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGICAL REVOLUTION

We have also seen the explosive growth of the information technology which can be used to transmit knowledge and skills. As early as 1973, Illich recognised the potential for deschooling of this growth when he wrote:

Data and skills an individual might have acquired shape into exploratory, creative, open-ended, and personal meaning only when they are used in dialectic encounter. And this requires the guaranteed freedom for every individual to state, each day, the class of issue which he wants to discuss, the class of creative use of a skill in which he seeks a match—to make this bid known—and, within reason, to find the circumstances to meet with peers who join his class. The rights of free speech, free press, and free assembly have traditionally meant this freedom. Modern electronics, photo-offset, and computer techniques in principle have provided the hardware that can provide this freedom with a range undreamt of in the century of enlightenment. Unfortunately, the scientific know-how has been used mainly to increase the power and decrease the number of funnels through which the bureaucrats of education, politics, and information channel their quick-frozen TV dinners. But the same technology could be used to make peer-matching, meeting, and printing as available as the private conversation over the telephone is now.⁴⁸

Twenty years on, the progressive development of micro-computers, of data communications, of interactive multi-media, of cable and satellite television, of video, in short, of technology under the direct control of the individual, now makes Illich’s vision a practical proposition, if only we will grasp it. Existing technology allows the storage and transmission of every area of knowledge and skill, and varied methods for teaching them. No restriction exists within this technology to the range of knowledge and skills available to the individual who wishes to acquire them. The only restrictions are the ones imposed by those who appropriate to themselves the power to dictate what, where, from whom, and when, others will learn.

Libertarians must challenge that appropriation on the most fundamental philosophical level. Every individual is unique, is the rightful owner of himself or herself, and has the right to choose his or her learning and development in accordance with that uniqueness. We should not expect any two individuals to choose to learn exactly the same things over a period of years, any more than, for instance, any two individuals will choose to buy identical retail goods over the same period. One could quote any number of scientists as to the way in which each individual’s brain, each individual’s genetic make-up, and each individual’s DNA blueprint necessarily makes every person different from every other person who has ever lived. However, let us hear from George Bernard Shaw an extended description of human variety:

As I write these lines the newspapers are occupied by the exploits of a child of eight, who has just defeated twenty

adult chess players in twenty games played simultaneously, and has been able afterwards to reconstruct all the twenty games without any apparent effort of memory. Most people, including myself, play chess (when they play it at all) from hand to mouth, and can hardly recall the last move but one, or foresee the next move but two. Also, when I have to make an arithmetical calculation, I have to do it step by step with pencil and paper, slowly, reluctantly, and with so little confidence in the result that I dare not act on it without “proving” the sum by a further calculation involving more ciphering. But there are men who can neither read, write, nor cipher, to whom the answer to such sums as I can do is instantly obvious without any conscious calculation at all; and the result is infallible. Yet some of these natural arithmeticians have but a small vocabulary; are at a loss when they have to find words for any but the simplest everyday occasions; and cannot for the life of them describe mechanical operations which they perform daily in the course of their trade; whereas to me the whole vocabulary of English literature, from Shakespeare to the latest edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, is so completely and instantaneously at my call that I have never had to consult even a thesaurus except once or twice when for some reason I wanted a third or fourth synonym. Again, though I have tried and failed to draw recognizable portraits of persons I have seen every day for years, Mr Bernard Partridge, having seen a man once, will, without more strain than is involved in eating a sandwich, draw him to the life. The keyboard of a piano is a device I have never been able to master; yet Mr Cyril Scott uses it exactly as I use my own fingers; and to Sir Edward Elgar an orchestral score is as instantaneously intelligible at sight as a page of Shakespeare is to me. One man cannot, after trying for years, finger the flute fluently. Another will take up a flute with a newly invented arrangement of keys on it, and play it at once with hardly a mistake. We find people to whom writing is so difficult that they prefer to sign their name with a mark, and beside them men who master systems of shorthand and improvise new systems of their own as easily as they learnt the alphabet. These contrasts are to be seen on all hands, and have nothing to do with variations in general intelligence, nor even in the specialized intelligence proper to the faculty in question: for example, no composer or dramatic poet has ever pretended to be able to perform all the parts he writes for the singers, actors, and player who are his executants. One might as well expect Napoleon to be a fencer, or the Astronomer Royal to know how many beans make five any better than his bookkeeper. Even exceptional command of language does not imply the possession of ideas to express: Mezzofanti the master of fifty-eight languages, had less to say in them than Shakespeare with his little Latin and less Greek; and public life is the paradise of voluble windbags.⁴⁹

DOGS AND CHILDREN

Unfortunately, our “educational” system is run by the sort of voluble windbags who seriously ask us to believe that forcing millions of unique human beings into identical schools, where they are taught an identical curriculum, according to an identical schedule, is the only way to develop the potential of each individual. And then they complain about an “educational crisis”. How could such a crisis possibly fail to occur within any centrally planned, nationalised system with such a grotesque mismatch between the varied requirements of millions of consumers and the uniform product the planners impose on them? Imagine for a moment that the law forced all dog owners in this country to send their dogs to state-owned dog-training centres for a specified period. Imagine that a Whitehall committee laid down a list of tricks that every dog in every such centre must be trained to perform by special government-licensed trainers. Imagine that the government imposed tests on every dog at regular intervals to ensure that it could perform the tricks which the Whitehall committee had decreed it was to learn. Were the government to attempt to introduce such a

system, it would lead to such a storm of protest by dog owners and breeders, on the grounds of cruelty and barbarity, that the politicians would be forced to back down. The fact that no such uproar is currently evident says more about the relative positions of children and dogs in the English social hierarchy than it does about the merits of central planning.

It is time to start creating an uproar. Studies of Elizabethan England have shown that the population at that time held an extraordinarily high proportion of exceptional creative geniuses in every field of endeavour, geniuses who had been able, before the imposition of compulsory schooling, to develop their unique individual capacities, and to operate at the height of their mental powers, from the earliest age. It is very largely on the contributions of such geniuses that the advancement, and even survival, of any civilisation depends. Yet where is the emergence of such creative geniuses in the Britain of today? Ayn Rand’s novel *Atlas Shrugged* shows graphically what happens to a society when central planning causes the “men of the mind” to cease to function, and to engage in a “strike of the mind”. What is surely far more terrible is the prospect that the suffocation of young minds in the compulsory schools prevents the emergence of such geniuses in the first place.

REBUILD IT NEARER ...

Yet the freedom of the mind, and the freedom to develop the mind, is the right not only of geniuses, but of every human being. Our challenge demands far more than a mere modification of the present system of compulsory schooling. It demands that the legal power and the financial resources that every individual requires to effect his or her education be taken from the bureaucracy and handed back to the individual, to construct the education of his or her choice. And that means the individual, and not necessarily his or her parents. Of course parents will have an overwhelming influence in the selection of educational suppliers and techniques in the case of younger children. But one of the central purposes of libertarian education must be to make the young person himself or herself into an effective, informed, critical consumer of educational services from the earliest possible age. It is an unfortunate fact that many parents, whose own attitudes have been largely shaped by their indoctrination in compulsory schools, do not always choose what young people themselves would choose if they had the financial and legal power to create their own unique educations. And let us examine the writings and experience of the deschoolers and other educational movements which reject coercion, the insights of classical liberal scholars, the literature of personal success and humanistic psychology, scientific discoveries about the nature of the human mind and its learning processes, and the possibilities of the new technology to find ways in which this transformation can be brought about.

But it is an illusion to imagine that any practical or theoretical compromise is possible between those of us who believe in free minds and free markets and those who believe instead in compulsory schooling, with its ghastly corollary in such a thing as a National Curriculum. We must seek to spread the ideas of deschooling, and to convert as many as possible of those who take compulsory schooling for granted to libertarian alternatives. But the idea that there can be a system which combines coercion with freedom is a greater illusion than that of the “middle way” or “mixed economy” in economics. Rather it must our task, in the words of the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*,

To grasp this Sorry Scheme of Things entire,
Would not we shatter it to bits—and then
Remould it nearer to the Heart’s Desire!

It would be a betrayal of future generations, of those free individuals who alone will be capable of building the free society of the future, to imagine that any approach less vigorous will suffice.

NOTES

1. Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, (1971), 1986 edition, pp. 10-11.
2. *Ibid*, p. 91. Perhaps it should be pointed out that American nurses earn on average about three times the take-home pay of their British colleagues.
3. *Ibid*, pp. 14-15.
4. *Ibid*, p. 18. Libertarians would disagree with Illich here, in that they believe that individuals have the right to discriminate in any way they choose in terms of who they employ, buy from or sell to. But individuals who discriminate on such irrelevant grounds as previous schooling—or indeed race, sex, religion, sexuality, and so on—pay the price in that they thereby cut themselves off from valuable employees, suppliers and customers. The market punishes the bigot.
5. *Ibid*, pp. 20-21.
6. *Ibid*, pp 21-22. Libertarians will take issue here with Illich's use of the words "at public expense". I would argue that educational vouchers, or the "edu-credit" card suggested by Illich, would be a very useful transitional system. After a period of years, during which people had got used to the system, educational vouchers could be phased out and replaced by cash, except for the poor, who may require them as a form of subsidy. Certainly it is a priority to get away from the scandalous situation in British universities in which the poor pay for the rich. University places are rationed to the minority of individuals who perform best at state-imposed tests called A-levels. Because the rich have overwhelming advantages in getting these A-levels, they are overrepresented in universities. Young people from poorer backgrounds, who are excluded from universities under the rationing system, have to take low-paid jobs and pay, through their taxes, for the education of their social superiors in institutions from which they have been turned away, and may not wish to patronise anyway. And then university graduates typically get—or at least used to get—higher-paid jobs than those who have just paid for their degrees. Illich's suggestion that every individual should have an equal share of the educational budget, in the form of educational vouchers which he or she can spend on the education he or she wants, would certainly be an immeasurable improvement on our present system of educational finance, in the transition to a complete educational free market.
7. *Ibid*, pp. 22-23.
8. *Ibid*, p. 24.
9. *Ibid*, pp. 29, 31.
10. *Ibid*, p. 34.
11. *Ibid*, p. 37.
12. *Ibid*, pp. 37-39.
13. *Ibid*, p. 45.
14. *Ibid*, p. 46-47.
15. *Ibid*, p. 78.
16. *Ibid*, p. 80.
17. *Ibid*, p. 86.
18. *Ibid*, p. 87.
19. *Ibid*, p. 81.
20. *Ibid*, pp. 94-95.
21. *Ibid*, p. 95.22.
22. *Ibid*, p. 101.
23. *Ibid*, pp. 103-104.
24. Quoted in Peter Buckman, ed., *Education Without Schools*, Souvenir Press, London, 1973, p. 20.
25. Quoted in Ian Lister, introduction to Ivan Illich, *After Deschooling, What?*, (1973), Writers' and Readers' Publishing Cooperative, London, 1981 edition, p. 26.
26. Quoted in *ibid*, pp. 20-21.
27. Quoted in *ibid*, pp. 21-22.
28. Quoted in *ibid*, pp. 22-23.
29. *Ibid*, p. 23.
30. Quoted in *ibid*, pp. 23-24.
31. Quoted in *ibid*, p. 25.
32. *Ibid*, pp. 4-5.
33. Malcolm Bradbury, *The History Man*, (1975), Arrow Books/Hutchinson, London, 1981 edition, p. 138.
34. *Manfred*, in Byron, *Poetical Works*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1970 edition, p. 390.
35. F. A. Hayek, "The Use of Knowledge in Society", in Tibor R. Machan, ed., *The Libertarian Reader*, Rowman & Allanheld, Totowa, New Jersey, 1982, p. 69.
36. Quoted in *Sunday Telegraph*, review section, 20th September 1992, p. V.
37. Quoted in *ibid*.
38. Quoted in *ibid*.
39. Hayek, *op cit*, p. 70.
40. *Pied Beauty*, in Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Poems*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1960 edition, p. 74.
41. Karl R. Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, (1934), Hutchinson, London, 1972 edition, pp. 278-80.
42. Karl R. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, (1945), Routledge, London, 1947 edition, vol. II, pp. 270-271. Italics in original.
43. *Ibid*, vol. II, pp. 256-257. Italics in original.
44. Bertrand Russell, *Sceptical Essays*, (1935), George Allen & Unwin, London, 1960 edition, pp. 106-7.
45. Bertrand Russell, *Why I am Not a Christian*, (1957), George Allen & Unwin, London, 1975 edition, p. 10.
46. Quoted in Gregory Sandford and Richard Vigilante, *Grenada*, Madison Books, London, 1984, p. 71.
47. Quoted in *ibid*, p. 72.
48. Ivan Illich, *After Deschooling, What?*, *op cit*, pp. 53-54.
49. Bernard Shaw, *Back to Methuselah*, (1921) Constable, London, 1936 edition, pp. xxv-xxvi.