

Preface by Jacques Cheminade

The Controlled Disintegration of Education— What Every Parent and Teacher Should Know

I do not wish to contribute in any way to selling labor down the river, and I am quite aware that any labor, which is in competition with slave labor, whether the slaves are human or mechanical, must accept the conditions of work of slave labor.

—Norbert Wiener, in a letter to Walther Reuther, 1949.

The future is in the hand of slaves, and one well sees that the old world will be changed by the alliance that will be built one day between them—those of which the number and the misery are infinite.

—Henri Barbusse, French novelist, member of the French Communist Party, in *Le Feu Journal d'une Escouade*, 1916.

Children have an unlimited curiosity, and you can gently lead them to the edge of the Earth.

—Jean Jaurès, French Socialist leader prior to World War I.

In writing this Preface, I have the joy of sharing with you the emancipating work of a team.

For those who have done it, it is the work of a lifetime. It is not an academic analysis or merely a political exercise in style. It is a key that opens, from its starting point, education, the way for a society “to elevate the dignity of man, all the individuals of the human race,” as Lazare Carnot wrote in his time.

We dedicate the essays in this volume to all those who refuse to submit to the rules of sterile behavior and who have undertaken to revive the approach of those who created in order to inspire new creations; to the too often invisible army of teachers, who carry out their mission and to their students who have the joy of hearing enthusiasm come from the mouths of adults; to those who have dropped out of school, to whom we entrust this weapon to enlighten them on what they have suffered and to give them hope.



Jacques Cheminade, President of Schiller Institute
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The three quotations I have presented above belong to past times, but in their spirit, they are terribly current. Indeed, if the mission of education is to cultivate the innate potential in each human being to know, to understand and to act for the common good, to awaken to the joy of thinking and of the creative method, as Jean Jaurès tells us, today it is the teacher’s task to instill the skills and operational formulas that will serve the existing social system to which the child is asked to adapt, because he or she is not provided with the means to question it

in order to design a better one. Under the pretext of letting him discover by himself, he is showered with hypocritical benevolence, to play by the rules of the game of the dominant order.

Today’s ‘Mental Slavery’

In short, a new form of slavery, this time mental, is thus organized. Doesn’t the World Health Organization define a “mentally healthy person” as someone who “feels confident enough to adapt to a situation in which he or she cannot change anything”? The mind is thus shackled because rather than the “world of truth” desired by Simone Weil, the child is subjected to learning skills in order to manage the existing order.

The education reserved for the privileged is not the one intended for the majority.

The privileged are provided with an intense training to promote their competencies and to elevate the necessary skills to manage the system. The marketing and merchandising of business schools have replaced social promotion based on a truly scientific education.

To the others, is provided a minimal *de facto* education to proceed to the applications, a low-cost schooling to normalize and “learn to cope with Microsoft.” The common denominator being, instead of a culture of discovery, the creation by some algorithms, rules and procedures, the training of the masses making of them a useful supplement to digital technology and soon to

“artificial intelligence” (AI).

Two or three centuries ago, the uneducated majority of the population, not being able to read or write, and therefore not able to exercise their free will, let the educated minority decide for them—too often at their expense. Public instruction and national education, to a certain extent, remedied this injustice, even for the young person who had to leave school very early to work and to support his family. Such instruction, year after year and through educational reforms, provided some basic means for the individual to judge by himself and to defend his point of view, while benefiting, at least partially, from the social and intellectual elevation. This is the conception of the human being that inspired the National Council of the Resistance to implement the Langevin-Wallon plan [1944 French educational reform plan —ed.], “The high culture for all that goes beyond the common education for all.”

Our tragedy is that today, while access to higher education has greatly increased, the trend toward general emancipation is being reversed. We are returning to the oligarchic tendencies of the past, in the sugar-coated form of a supposedly liberal globalization. Attempting to deceive by means of propaganda does not change anything, except to arouse anger made manifest by the unbearable gap between the outpourings of the Ministry of National Education and reality.

The Fate of Teachers Today

The fate of the teachers is a proof of this. First of all, their financial fate: The entry-level salary, excluding bonuses, of teachers holding the Certificate of Aptitude for Secondary School Teachers (CAPES), which was 2.3% above minimum wage (SMIC) in 1980, will barely reach 1.2% above SMIC in 2022, taking into account inflation. Moreover, the current government is openly mocking them. The Ministry had promised a “shock of attraction” for the profession. A 10% increase in salaries is indeed announced, but it is not enough to catch up with the average of the other countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and above all, to reach this 10%, the Ministry in reality includes other measures already taken, such as the “Blan-



École Polytechnique/Jérémy Barande

Instead of promoting a culture of discovery, the education system degrades teachers and trains the masses to accept rules and procedures, turning them into mere functional supplements of algorithms, digital technology, and soon, AI.

quer bonus” [named after Jean-Michel Blanquer, Minister of National Education] and the €150 computer bonus, as well as the freezing of the salary index of all civil servants, revalued by 3.5% in July 2022. The government’s plan foresees increasing the salaries of teachers who accept additional workloads while they are already overworked, due to budget-restricted recruitment of additional teachers.

It is therefore clear that teachers are not being given a material or moral status commensurate with their technical and human value and the place they hold in national life.

In the daily life of the teacher, their undervaluation manifests itself, as it does for doctors and hospital staff, in the feeling of not being able to do their job well. It is this “prevented work” from which the majority suffer. A principal education advisor expressed this uneasiness as follows:

I have the impression that I am there to make things go a little less badly, but certainly not to make things go well.

Many teachers feel abandoned or ignored. Moreover, almost all teachers rightly complain about the absence of association with the real definition and the means to carry out their jobs; an absence of participation which is the last straw, when to educate is precisely to reach everyone to participate in public life.

The Purpose of This Report

Our Report widens the debate by showing that this disastrous situation in education is a reflection of an entire society reduced to a faceless slavery. The dominant oligarchy exercises a financial dictatorship via autonomous networks of digital and AI control centers. In order to maintain their system, the oligarchy confines freedom to predefined managerial objectives. For example: Freedom to obey! In the corporation this is called “Participative Management by Objectives” (PMO), in which contracts of objectives and means to carry them out are assigned according to profitability. Financial performance indicators frame and measure the “partici-

pation.” In the devious conception of education that we here denounce, this is called “Pedagogy by Objectives” (PPO): it is designed to tighten the dominant order. The blatant proof of this is given in the economics courses.

They teach now in public high schools that the “well managed” private sector is superior to the public one! Thematic pages from the European Union funded *Melchior* website [see Chapter 2, page 40] are provided to students as part of the official partnership between the Business Institute and the Ministry of National Education, promoting the ultra-liberal approach closely monitored by Michel Pébereau, former President of the *Haut Conseil pour l’Education* and Chairman of the Banque Nationale de Paris.

It is a veritable pedagogical counter-revolution that has been put in place, removing large numbers of workers from any relationship with the physical production process. Vocational and technical education is progressively being dismantled under the pretext that one could operate from digitized models displayed on computer monitors, without risks of physical accidents. The imperative of financial profitability has its (bad) consequences. While we talk about relocating our industries, not only are we not organizing the “on-the-spot” training to achieve this, but we are abandoning the existing ones.

In counterpoint, those who inspire creativity, Wilhelm von Humboldt, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, Johann Friedrich Herbart and Jean Jaurès, as well as those who, each in their own way, worked with their own spirit, such as Élisée Reclus, Maria Montessori, and Célestin Freinet, must become the sources of a radically different, if not opposite approach. Their approach was not to adapt pupils and students to a sick society, but to offer each of them a sense of purpose in the face of the challenges of their time; the essential nourishment for all life in society.

The Spark of Human Creativity

The separation between the acquisition of knowledge and the emancipation of the student’s creativity, the “actor of his own knowledge,” is the absurdity of a society that respects neither of them. It is a construction as fictitious as that of financial capital; fictitious capital of a world where the immersion in the virtual translates into a very real oppression. When we consider concrete things, this lack of respect becomes clear.

Therefore, I will only believe in a real reform of education when it produces joy in the teachers and stu-



Lithograph by Friedrich Oldermann



Nadar, 1904

Two great inspirers of creativity, Wilhelm von Humboldt (left) and Jean Jaurès (right).

dents, accessing knowledge and improving themselves. By what signs? When the candidates rush to teach and become aware again of fostering the spark that has been in each of us since birth; when students will no longer hold back from going to school in order to avoid going to bathrooms lacking hygiene and privacy. Absent such a real reform, a majority of students, between the difficulties of their daily life at school and their addiction to digital devices outside, will see their ability to concentrate diminish and feel their dignity is not respected.

Harassment results from an environment of a ferocious free-for-all competition in which a social “Wild West” is becoming the rule, even now in privileged neighborhoods. In higher education, 27% of students are anxious, 36.6% depressed, and 12.7% have suicidal thoughts. I will only believe in a true reform for teachers and professors when these symptoms of the crisis are erased by political will.

Seen from the field today, with the eyes of a better future world, President Emmanuel Macron’s “Copernican Revolution” [Appendix, p. 183] is only one more improvement, if one is optimistic, or a worsening of the situation if one is less so. It fails to go to the causes.

This Preface aims to give you the appetite to read the rest of our Special Report. I have already said too much. So, take these weapons to free ourselves from the new and insidious escalation that the oligarchy wants to impose on us today. As in the time of Henri Barbusse and Jean Jaurès, the future is in the hands of the slaves and in the unlimited curiosity of the children that we must lead slowly to the edge of the Earth. At this time when war has once again come to Europe and the economy is (except for luxury) being dismantled by finance, “to abstain is already to collaborate.”