

Editorial

Educating Americans

The poorness of U.S. schools in terms of performance, breadth of subject matter, and even discipline, compared to those of other nations has become a timeworn theme. Clearly, there is an element of correctness in criticisms of the recent Governors Conference on Education, that without significant additional funding, talk of reforms is pretty much illusory; but that is by no means the whole story.

Perhaps the most dangerous statistics are those concerning the scientific illiteracy of the American population. While the situation is better in European and Japanese schools, we would contend that the underlying problem which is eroding American schools is also operative in Europe and to a far lesser extent in Japan—that is, the growing irrationalism of the population, which is being fed by the anti-science environmentalist movement.

In the U.S. and in Europe many citizens are now willing to accept measures which will destroy the economy of their nations, the very means of existence of the world's population, in their misplaced zeal to protect the environment. The level of hysteria being generated is such that they are willing to accept frauds like the "greenhouse effect" whole-hog. This anti-science climate is the backdrop against which failing school performance must be judged.

This growing irrationality of large sections of the population—emphatically not excluding the teachers and parents of school-age children—goes part and parcel with an increasingly hedonistic world view which ignores consequences in favor of satisfaction in the here and now, particularly in the two generations which have reached maturity over the past 25 years. Without an adequate causal view of day-to-day reality, there is no basis upon which an individual can form a truly scientific conception of the universe. The environmentalist movement may be seen as an expression of this more fundamental social problem.

We are on the verge of one of the greatest depressions in human history precisely because the majority of Americans and citizens of Western Europe accepts the myth that a consumer-oriented economy can be kept

afloat through financial manipulation without regard to the exigencies of supporting the production even of such necessities as food—in other words, they accept the myths of the free market.

The so-called scientific community is equally bankrupt when it comes to redressing the situation. For example, *Nature* and *Science* magazines serve as the self-proclaimed arbiters of acceptable standards of research. They are fearless when it comes to attacking the work and reputation of scientists such as the French biologist Benveniste, who challenged accepted notions of how allergins—and implicitly the immune system—function; or the work and reputation of Fleischmann and Pons who seem to have been able to achieve "cold" fusion from simply (although not easily) reproducible table-top laboratory experiments.

These two science magazines of record, one British the other American, have both endorsed legalization of drugs. *Science* did it by featuring an article on the subject; the more honest *Nature* did so editorially.

In a nine-page argument replete with 78 footnotes, in the Sept. 1 issue of *Science*, author Ethan A. Nadelmann sought to develop the false argument that drug trafficking is uncontrollable and in any event that drug use is a victimless crime. With no basis in fact, he also claimed that legalizing drugs would reduce the crime rate and enhance the quality of urban life through higher tax revenues.

He failed to comment on the deteriorated quality of life for those trapped into drug dependence, particularly young people. Neither here nor in *Nature* will you find reference to the ample documentation of the irreversible metabolic, psychological, and educational damage done to young people who become regular drug abusers. The Sept. 7 issue of *Nature* editorialized at length on the benefits of drug decriminalization for the United States. The magazine commented on the opportunities for synthesizing designer drugs of great variety, and argued by analogy to Prohibition, that punitive regulation cannot ultimately succeed.

There are grave problems in American schools, but they go far beyond the educational institutions *per se*.