

## Readings, Writings and Riches: Education and the Socio-Economic Order in North America

*Readings, Writings, and Riches: Education and the Socio-Economic Order in North America.* Randle W. Nelsen and David A. Nock, eds., Kitchener, Ont.: Between the Lines, 1978. 320 pp. \$16.50 (cloth); \$10.50 (paper).

With the publication of this series of articles, Nelsen and Nock intend to effect educational change within a corporate, capitalist system. Underlying the collection is an anti-liberal, anti-pluralist perspective on the analysis of the economics of certain issues in North American education. The contributors, mainly sociologists and anthropologists, utilize a wide variety of methodological approaches both quantitative and qualitative. All levels of education are dealt with, but the emphasis is on higher education.

Although the authors would like to facilitate economic and educational change, they admittedly provide no clear solutions or alternatives for change. Rather, their articles pose contrasting arguments on the premise "that significant, fundamental change will not be created from a dependency upon unilinear programmes, but rather from the clash of evaluative debate and confrontation over on-going practice." (pp. 7-8)

The editors assume that Canadian and American education can be regarded as similar institutions because of the countries' basically similar economic structures. Such oversimplifications are not only doubtful but mitigate the editors' primary purpose of illuminating the economic and educational inter-relationship. That everything is reducible to economics including demographic, sociological and cultural factors may or may not be a valid assumption. What is unacceptable is the premise that both Canada and the U.S. have basically similar economic structures and, consequently, similar educational forms. Such sweeping generalizations can only distort the study of the linkage between the two institutions. Their deliberate exclusion of Quebec for cultural rather than economic reasons, for example, undermines the editors' key assumption. The study is not really comparative; the two systems are conveniently lumped together as if no differences of any significance existed between them. To define two economic systems merely as corporate, monopolistic, and capitalist is insufficient if one wants to discover how their peculiar economic forms influence and affect education.

If one has reservations about the book as a whole, the same is not necessarily true of its constituent parts. The book consists of six sections, each prefaced with an introduction by the editors to assist the reader in placing the chapter into a theoretical context. Each article is footnoted, containing useful references to related literature. However, in some cases the citations amount to little more than name-dropping.

The book begins with a forceful theoretical critique of liberal values in education and the capitalist system. Nelsen attacks three renowned sociologists, Burton Clark, David Riesman and Christopher Jencks, and their argument that education is autonomous and independent of socio-economic arrangements. This essay stands out as a rational and articulate critique compared to the more shrill, strident ideological tone of others.

A study of eight Ontario universities by John Barkans and Norene Pupo attempts to illustrate in a crucial sense how universities are not autonomous institutions. Documenting their analyses with "hard" data, the authors examine memberships of boards of governors and structural constraints upon the universities. Their presentation is factual, but unconvincing from a social scientific point of view. They illustrate that members of the corporate elite do sit on boards of governors, but they do not demonstrate that these people have influence except through episodic instances.

Nelsen rejoins the discussion with a description of how the university and industrial worlds are merging. Using the American example of the multiversity, he concludes that there has been no real social change because institutions have functioned to maintain and strengthen the socio-economic arrangements of corporate capitalism. He describes university professors as believing in intellectual autonomy but not behaving accordingly. If this is true, can books such as this stimulate university teachers to question their role in the education-economic sphere? The point is — is anyone at universities listening?

Edgar Z. Friedenburg's contribution — provocative, colourful, but subjective — contrasts with the more conventional essays in this collection. He contrasts the political cultures of America and Canada in trying to explain the intellectual and economic subordination of Canada to the United States. To make statements as he does about national character and to generalize from particular instances to whole nations without data however, is dubious.

The most provocative argument is that of Arthur K. Davis who discusses the inappropriateness of

American structural-functionalism for Canadian sociology. Davis advocates instead the dialectical method and historical perspective. According to Davis, Canada's intellectual life is subordinate to American because Canadian sociology is dominated by structural-functionalism. However, if structural-functionalism is inappropriate for Canadian studies because of its American origins, one must also discount conflict theory which similarly is of American origin. One would not quarrel with Davis' point that Canadian social science is overly reliant on American scholarship, but he does not explain the connection between the structural-functional approach and our academic subordination.

Only in the last section do Nelsen and Nock finally confront the real challenge in the state-economy-education triangle — that is, is economic change a prerequisite for educational change, or can education function to bring about political social and economic change? Jim Harding and Malcolm Garber merely present both sides of the question; whether or not education can perform that function, the reader can only conclude that it has not yet challenged the system of class and power in Canada.

These articles span a broad spectrum in style and quality. In some of the contributions the ideological bias of the authors interferes with the substance of their arguments. The book, therefore, offers very little for the researcher. It would be most appropriate as an introduction for a political economy of education for senior undergraduate students with some knowledge of sociology.

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