

# Blindsided by Education's Leftists

Republicans Assure Their Own Marginalization

by B.K. Eakman

Michael Moore, the leftist director of *Fahrenheit 9/11*, got one thing right when he proclaimed at a June 24 press conference that, despite the Republican control of the White House and Congress, America is liberal. It is a fact. The Republican Party, the only home conservatives have at election time, does not remotely resemble the GOP of Reagan or Goldwater or Nixon or Eisenhower.

Much of the blame can be laid at the feet of conservative "leaders," who continue to shoot themselves in the foot on every issue—environmental extremism, abortion, limited government, crime—because, for 40 years, American public schools have been indoctrinating each class of new high-school graduates in leftism.

Many true conservatives were disheartened when Ronald Reagan (and, later, the Newt Gingrich-led "Contract With America") failed to follow through on campaign promises to shut down the U.S. Department of Education—a creation that everyone knew was a sop to the National Education Association (NEA) in 1976 by then-Democratic candidate Jimmy Carter. Today, conservatives continue to be stumped over the reticence of legislators that they elected, in the name of stopping communism and socialism, to take on America's left-leaning education system—not only for the sake of nation, but for the sake of the Republican Party itself. Increasingly, serious conservatives are looking at third-party options—or just not voting at all.

At least three of President Reagan's senior advisors in the Department of Education warned him about the escalation of left-leaning schools. But neither his appointed education secretary, William Bennett, nor Mr. Bennett's deputies were moved to do anything with the information.

Among the items these advisors presented was a laundry list of left-leaning foundations, think tanks, and university researchers to which the Department of Education was awarding grants that funded unsound methodologies, controversial programs, and countercultural curricula. They uncovered plans written by top officials inside the department's own research arm, the National Institute of Education, to redirect American schools away from excellence toward mere functionality, and they confirmed links between certain federally "validated" curricula and the U.N. Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Indeed, two of President Reagan's own children, Patti and Ron, were testaments in the 1980's to the damage inflicted by Marxist educators. The pair noisily rejected both their father and traditional American values—and still do.

I was a young, just-married teacher in Orange County, Cali-

fornia, when Ronald Reagan was governor. Having attended a rigorous private academy in Washington, D.C., for most of my life, I was appalled to discover that, in the time it had taken me to complete college, schools were turning out not merely eighth graders two or three years behind private schools, as before, but youngsters, just ten years my junior, who could not read, spell, or do simple arithmetic. Nothing in my university teacher-training courses prepared me for the deterioration in learning and conduct I discovered at Johnson Intermediate School in Westminster, California—a middle school not much different from others around the nation.

I seemed to be the only one in my district giving essay assignments; most teachers were handing out social-adjustment games. There was pressure to hire younger, supposedly "hip" teachers (like me) and to force older, tougher teachers into retirement by saddling them with the worst-behaved classes.

For me, the final two straws came, first, when the dress codes were scrapped and, secondly, when the NEA launched its campaign to hoodwink teachers into joining its soon-to-be consolidated local, state, and national unions, which had previously been separate and voluntary. Suddenly, our classrooms were filled with backward baseball caps and gross-out T-shirts that made our jobs even harder. Then, when we got to the teachers' lounge, our mailboxes were stuffed with union leaflets condemning administrators, parents, and state policymakers for low salaries and poor benefits.

I was naive, of course. The money did not look so bad to me. I would have done worse accepting an entry-level position in journalism or technical writing. It bothered me that the NEA was not advocating backup in the office for disciplinary problems or lobbying against relaxed standards of behavior, which, by that time, included cursing, vandalizing desks, spitting on the floor, and talking back to teachers. The union did not condemn social promotion, or the excess of drug-and-sex programs, or even the absence of clear-cut benchmarks for each grade level.

If our "professional organization" really had wanted to do something for us, I thought, salaries and benefits were the least of our problems. Union leaders denounced tests of all kinds, calling them "humiliating." They criticized workbooks and drills as "boring" and advocated chaotic "open classrooms." The NEA upheld the doctrine of "moral equivalency" between communist and Christian values, supported the Sandinista government in Nicaragua, and favored socialist economic policies over free-market principles.

In frustration, I wrote a letter to Governor Reagan, explaining the situation as I saw it and describing just how many of the "special activities" and "supplementary curriculums," in particular, were built around anti-American themes. I revealed how some of us who did not buy in to the union-led rhetoric were seeking out alternate curriculum repositories outside the district just to

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*B.K. Eakman, a former teacher, is the executive director of the National Education Consortium and author of Cloning of the American Mind.*

find suitable materials from which to teach. Often, this meant resurrecting older texts, some of them stamped “obsolete.”

My comments to Governor Reagan must have struck a nerve. I received a wonderful, hand-written response (which I eventually lost—who knew that he would one day be President and that the letter would be a collector’s item?). He commiserated, theorizing that the Marxist-inspired student demonstrations in the universities were filtering down into elementary and secondary classrooms. He wrote that he was forwarding a copy of my letter to Max Rafferty, then California’s superintendent of instruction, with a directive to look into my allegations and get back to him with suggestions.

In due course, I received a personal response from Max Rafferty. It was no form letter, either. Mr. Rafferty was particularly concerned about forced unionization.

Despite the lack of a positive outcome, both Ronald Reagan and Max Rafferty appeared to be sincere. What I do not think they recognized—nor did I, at the time—was that local, state, and federal agencies had already been outmaneuvered. The two teacher unions (the NEA and the AFT) had a certain amount of influence with teachers and administrators, of course, but they were not necessarily calling the shots.

Tax-exempt foundations such as the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teachers (CFAT) were giving the marching orders—and not just to the teachers’ unions. CFAT was carefully inserting politically acceptable individuals into state education agencies and the federal bureaucracy—such entities as the Education Commission of the States and the old Office of Education, when it was still under the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

CFAT also was raking in millions of dollars from its for-profit spin-off, the Educational Testing Service (ETS). ETS was constructing most of the testing instruments in the United States—and beginning to incorporate psychological and opinion-oriented items. Several of ETS’s presidents, such as Ralph Tyler, were sitting as commissioners of the Office of Education, which should have been seen as a conflict of interest. Tyler was also busy creating tests for state after state under separate contracts and helping to formulate what would become the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

Since 1947, when UNESCO was launched—with two grants, one each from the NEA and CFAT—the liberal-leftists understood the stakes in institutionalizing a Marxist-based education system. They knew even from the beginning of the European counterculture movement that schools were their ace-in-the-hole, assuring the *overall* success of Marxist socialism, whatever temporary political setbacks might occur from one administration to another in the free world.

Toward that end, UNESCO was able to weave a web across Europe and the United States of highly placed associates to serve as “agents of influence.” The term morphed into “agents of change,” then “agents of social change,” and, finally, just “change agents.”

By contrast, traditionalists, since World War II, were busy playing catch-up. They started about 15 years too late. They failed to anticipate the menace that Marxism posed as far back as the Allies’ march to Berlin at the close of World War II, when Gen. George S. Patton was told to wait until the Soviets could meet us and go in together.

Despite attempts by the House Committee on Un-American Activities to turn public opinion against communism, the cult

of celebrity greatly influenced the young. The education establishment increasingly called upon left-leaning stars to speak on behalf of various initiatives, such as antidrug programs. The fact that many, even most, of these celebrities were wolfing down recreational drugs, condemning American policy abroad, and being notoriously promiscuous failed to hurt their credibility because the media had already idolized them.



In 1958, California’s Senate Investigating Committee on Education convened hearings on Marxist propagandizing in the schools. The Sixteenth Investigating Committee Report on Education quotes portions of teachers’ guides, elementary- and secondary-school curricula, and teacher-training texts, revealing an obvious Marxist slant. Yet, the propagandizing continued.

Erich Fromm, author of *Escape From Freedom*, for example, was lauded in teacher-training classes as an outstanding contributor to modern educational theories—including at the university I attended. It was he who coined the term *authoritarian aggressors* to describe the defenders of traditional norms. His theories form the roots of today’s self-esteem movement.

Max Horkheimer echoed Fromm’s wisdom in his book *Studies on Authority and the Family*. The family, he wrote, “produces the attitudes which predispose men for blind submission”—the implication being that families were incubators of Nazism.

This is the kind of pap that still passes for teacher training. Mr. Reagan, his Department of Education appointees, and most leaders of conservative think tanks failed to examine such materials, so they could not comprehend the appeal of Marxism to young, college-age students preparing for careers in teaching.

In 1958, Mr. Reagan was just becoming aware of the scope of Marxist influence within his own profession; he had not set his sights on the governor’s mansion, much less the White House. There is an even chance that he never read the text of California’s hearings.

The United States, of course, remained distracted with various crises and issues. Education simply was not a national priority—until the launching of *Sputnik*, when legislators suddenly realized what most parents had already noticed: that the level of hard knowledge was dropping precipitously. Our communist adversaries inflicted damage that went considerably beyond the scrapping of substantive learning, however. Marxist professors and bureaucrats, who began swelling the ranks of the profession, made it their mission to set in place policies that would create a “Lord of the Flies” subculture. By the mid-60’s, it would be dubbed a “generation gap.” This subculture was endowed with

power—and money—and, by 1968, when I started to teach, cultural Marxism was trumping any serious effort to transmit knowledge to America's youth.

Ronald Reagan was blindsided by his fixation on the Soviet Union. Like many of his colleagues, including Max Rafferty, he thought that, if the Soviet Union could just be made to break apart, the Marxist underpinnings would fall with it—in the schools, in the media, in the motion-picture industry. It would all turn around once everyone could plainly see that Soviet communism had failed.

This proved to be a miscalculation.

Of course, President Reagan had more on his plate than stopping the Soviet arms buildup. He also wanted to curtail stagflation and double-digit inflation, inherited from Democrat Jimmy Carter, and rekindle respect for America worldwide. *However, the extent to which cultural Marxist and socialist economic principles had already become institutionalized in the American psyche eluded him.*

Failure to teach and instill free-market concepts has produced a large egalitarian faction that believes socialist systems fall short only when legislation fails to give everyone an equal share of the pie. That someone must first *create* a pie escapes their logic. Economic prosperity requires unleashing the creative energies of enterprising people through the profit motive, but collegiates unschooled in free-market principles viewed pie-making as government's job.

The schools also produced a plethora of amoral elitists who found the strictures of civilized society confining. Even ideals of honor, decency and integrity were rejected in favor of “self-actualization,” a me-first mentality.

President Reagan was a rarity in Tinseltown. He never forgot who he was or his humble beginnings. He was, by all reports, a good man. “I believe that man is essentially good,” he said, and “that good eventually triumphs over evil.” While good may indeed triumph, President Reagan's enthusiasm for such an outcome in the short term may have blinded him to the perverse staying power of cultural Marxism and economic socialism—even with a defunct Soviet Union.

He was not alone. Today, education is the stuff of photo-opportunities—Presidents and their wives sitting among minority children, making nice. Band-aids like Head Start and testing are hopelessly outweighed by the lack of real teaching skills, leftist propagandizing, and classroom chaos.

By the 1990's, the left went “back to basics.” It realized it had to divert attention from its endgame. It proceeded under the rubric of “mental health.” Dr. John Rawlings Rees had pointed the way in a 1947 address to the National Council for Mental Hygiene: “We must aim to make [psychology] permeate every educational activity in our national life. . . . [W]e have [already] made a useful attack on a number of professions. The two easiest of them naturally are the teaching profession and the Church. . . . I think we must imitate the Totalitarians and organize some kind of fifth column activity.”

An early guru of the mental-health movement, Dr. Paul Popenoe, put it another way: “The school should be a sieve through which all the children of the country are passed. . . . It is very desirable that no child escape inspection.”

Having set in motion the contempt for authority that eventually gave us Columbine, the left started launching programs ostensibly aimed at “prevention”—i.e., screening for troubled youth—masking its agenda of inspecting for political correct-

ness. The strategy combined the burgeoning new field of computerized cross-matching with psychological profiling. The inauguration of Dr. Rees's proposal could not have been timed better. Conservatives, at this point largely marginalized by the media, were completely blindsided.

George W. Bush, like his father, knew America's education system was in trouble. He thought that, if only he could mandate testing in reading and math, he would force the hand of “progressive” educators. They would have no choice but to re-establish standards. In that rationale, he made three errors. First, he was convinced by his neoconservative allies that tests were, well, actually tests. The term *assessment* was lost on both Bush presidencies, in particular the fact that assessments measured opinions more than academics. Secondly, even the few standards that emerged (such as the Standards of Learning in Virginia and the Profiles of Learning in Minnesota) were initiated more as a way to force teachers to bring minority children from lower-income families up to the mediocre level of their middle-class peers. Of course, no such thing occurred. Standards soon had to be lowered across the board to avoid a political backlash.

George W. Bush also inherited his father's bias toward the United Nations, which had helped to establish the elder Mr. Bush's credibility on the world stage. Even though the United Nations thumbed its nose at the President's War on Terror, he reendorsed UNESCO, undermining any chance he might have had to improve America's schools.

Even the most prestigious conservative think tanks and advisory organizations do not seem to understand that the interests of the Republican Party are not being served when schools are turning out little socialists year after year. They somehow expect that curricula which denigrate self-reliance and individualism, play down national sovereignty, scoff at the existence of a Creator, and advocate socialist solutions to healthcare and unemployment are going to produce conservative Republicans.

Exactly how is teacher preparation that is geared to promote Marxist ideals supposed to energize the electorate to vote Republican? Or advance traditional values? The questions conservative organizations and think tanks should be asking are: How can we remove the red tape so that private-school startup costs are lessened, thereby providing more supply to meet the demand? What are the “breakthrough” methodologies that would revolutionize, without stigma, the teaching of basic subjects? Can we support these techniques through the universities—instead of writing each state a blank check? How can we penalize the teachers' unions so that they cannot masquerade as “professional associations”?

In the end, axing the U.S. Department of Education became a no-go, while dozens of vested interests helped sustain a *quid pro quo* between the department and agencies of the left—all committed to Marxist socialism.

Conservatives will continue to redouble their efforts while missing their aim as long as they refuse to take on the education behemoth. How long before young graduates are no longer schooled well enough in the principles of liberty to bother defending them?

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# There's No Place Like Home

Simon Says, "Go to School"

by Michael McMahon



Every school has a playground for its pupils; English schools provide a playground for politicians, too. Children seek security, regularity, and continuity: The games they play in the schoolyard observe rules that do not change. Change, though, is the contemporary politician's reason for existence: He seeks not to hold fast to that which is good but to run fast to something he fancies will be better. And he wants to make everyone else run fast, too. For the here-today-gone-the-day-after-tomorrow politician, the all-change game offers excitement, but the children that are forced to play it every day are bored. "Simon Says" is no fun if the same person always plays Simon and prefaces his every instruction with "Simon says."

The self-contradiction of Simon's sayings to the last several generations of British schoolchildren is reflected in the constant rebranding of what used to be known as the Department of Education. The first change came under Margaret Thatcher, when it became the Department of Education and Science, in which the "Science" that was thus celebrated was not theoretical but applied, and applied to the development of national wealth. Later, it became the Department of Education and Employment, in which the "and" really meant "for." Then, the word "for" was slipped into the title, but in a different place, when our schools found themselves lorded over by a Department for Education and Employment—though, by then, by any orthodox definition of *education*, the department was clearly agin it.

Now, the legion-named ministry styles itself the Department for Education and Skills, the DfES. The change originally demonstrated the government's belief that education is a comprehensive continuum in which manual and intellectual dexterities are equally valued, because the national workforce needs both, and education exists to prepare people for work.

However, the government has come up against a problem. The prospect of birth, school, employment, and death (interspersed with plasma-screened TV reality shows and package holidays to Disneyland) is interrupted for many by an inability to engage with the system. They do not have what it takes to integrate with what today passes for schooling, or with what today passes for society. And they do not have it because their parents do not have it, either.

The real skills shortage in Britain today is not a lack of plumbers, computer programmers, or town planners: The skill in really short supply is parenting. Having offered education to the nation as the solution to all her problems, the government has found that one of the deepest national difficulties is that many children cannot engage with it, because their parents are unable to offer them the encouragement, guidance, or support they need to make something of themselves at school—or even, in many cases, to get there with anything approaching regularity. Inadequacy thus begets inadequacy, and the sins—and omissions—of the parents are visited upon the children and on the neighbors that their selfish behavior disturbs.

In deprived areas all over the country, promised school improvements have been stalling because of the intractability of dysfunctional children, and the government has been forced to acknowledge what it had so long denied: that poor results do not necessarily indicate poor teaching, and that poorly parented children can sometimes be impossible to teach. The drive for higher examination results is still on, but now, a new strategy employed to achieve them is to put pressure on mothers (and fathers, where known and present) to play their part. One of the "skills" that the education department finds itself responsible for is parenting, and its approach to raising standards here is even more heavy-handed than it was when the party line was to blame the teachers.

Fixed-penalty fines have been introduced for the parents of

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*Michael McMahon writes from Norfolk, England.*