

Singapore's system isn't perfect, but the cane is. We're told that Mr. Fay is shaking in his boots at the prospect. Poor baby. I say, loosen up the old rattan. It leaves "permanent scars"? Well, so does street crime, and I venture to say that young Michael will never pick up a can of spraypaint again. So long as he lives in Singapore, anyway.

Three other teenagers were recently arrested in Houston after videotaping themselves committing various crimes, and laughing about it. They were blowing up mail boxes, burning home air conditioners—which ought to be a felony in humid Houston—and piling junk on a bicycle path to wreck riders. In our "justice" system, nothing will happen to these young men until they mug or rape or murder someone, and probably not then. But a public flogging might be just the trick.

Over the past five years, Singapore has had to cane only 14 vandals aged 16 to 21. Here, a jail term can make you a big man. But not a tough spanking on your bare rear end. The punishment enlists the emotion of shame, particularly powerful among adolescents, in the cause of law and order. It would have the same effect among our youthful offenders, and I'd bring back the stocks and the rotten tomatoes too.

For more serious crimes, we could administer more strokes, and in all cases, force prisoners to work to repay their victims.

Doesn't America have anything to teach Singapore? Well, maybe we could send over John McEnroe, to make sure that their follow-through is nice and clean. ■

Miseducation 2000

by L.H.R., Jr.

"This is the beginning," said President Clinton as he signed the Goal 2000 Educate America Act. "Today we can say America is serious about education."

Wise up, Bill. Nobody believes that dumping \$647 million on the public school system is going to fix a thing. Nor will posting a list of lofty goals on the principal's door.

As Mr. Clinton knows, 2000 is an election year, and he won't be running. When it turns out that U.S. students aren't the "first in the world in math and science," as his ludicrous goals state, he'll be collecting his plush presidential pension back in Little Rock.

As for his goal of achieving a 90% high school graduation

rate, I have a better idea. Let's confer a PhD on every child at the age of 15, and then keep in school only those who can learn, and want to do so. The others can go to work, where they can pick up a useful skill.

If anyone believes we need another round of Washington, D.C., education reform, let's give him a rap on the knuckles. The troubles with our system run very deep. We can't hope to solve them unless we're willing to reexamine our assumptions.

Helping us do that is Michael Prowse, an economic journalist for the London *Financial Times*. Unlike American journalists or academics, he speaks his mind. Even more unlike them, he's worth listening to.

For example, in a March 2nd article, Mr. Prowse asks us to throw out an assumption rooted in the 19th century. "You are educated first, be it to age 16, 21, or whatever, then you enter the world of work, at which point you can happily stop learning." This idea, always absurd, is especially outmoded in an economy

that changes as rapidly as ours.

For most people, Mr. Prowse points out, it is a net loss to sit around a public

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school for 18 years, when vocational training can begin early. Far better to learn the basics, and then a skill that will actually be useful.

The traditional idea of apprenticeship allows a person to work for no wage or even a negative wage (i.e. the worker pays the employer) in exchange for the chance to learn. The Labor Department doesn't like this idea, because it violates every labor law on the books. A solution: throw out every labor law on the books.

What about higher education? It "imposes a crushing financial burden on professionals (or their parents), because they do not enter the labour market until their late 20s." Mr. Prowse would reverse the sequence. Young people would start working early, and pay out-of-pocket for needed education.

Besides, not everybody is suited for 16 or 21 years in school. Giving high school diplomas to 90% doesn't make them better educated or more prepared to make their own way in life. We hold the idea of "universal access" so dear that we can't see how inferior the universal product has become.

"Why is the world of education—from kindergarten to post-graduate study—so hidebound?" Mr. Prowse asks. Because it is "almost everywhere dominated by the public sector. Without huge subsidies higher education simply would not exist on its present scale. And this might not matter: lack of university chairs did not exert

much of a drag on the 18th-century Enlightenment."

Mr. Prowse raises the specter of people paying for what they learn, meaning that they would value it. "We now live in a topsyturvy world where most parents are happy to spend large sums on cars, homes, gadgets, and holidays but regard 'free' state education as a natural right."

"If more people," he continues, "could be persuaded to regard education as a service for which they should pay at least something (preferably a lot), and hence assume some direct control, they might be amazed by the subsequent pace of reform."

Revolutionary? Absolutely. But far from unthinkable. Every other good and service must fit the needs of individual customers. Why not education? Some people write treatises

on law, history, and economics. Others manage businesses, build houses, and repair cars. Others are day laborers. Others are entrepreneurs. In a free society, everyone can make a contribution.

From Mr. Prowse, we can draw up two good goals for 2000. First, every student will get the education that suits

his needs, talents, and desires. Second, education will be funded by the student, the parent, or some other party in the private sector. A final proposal: get the central government out of education, and save that \$647 million. ■

Gatt Tricks

by L.H.R., Jr.

Read the fine print on a contract, your Dad said. And his

rule applies to nations too, especially for treaties that purport to establish free trade.

The Clinton negotiators helped write the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, signed by the President on April 15. These advocates of statism and trade wars are anxious to pass Gatt. What do

they know that conservative Gatt supporters do not?

They know that this Gatt round is not about lowering tariffs to expand the international economy. It is about controlling that economy. To that purpose, Article One establishes a new international bureaucracy called the World Trade Organization

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