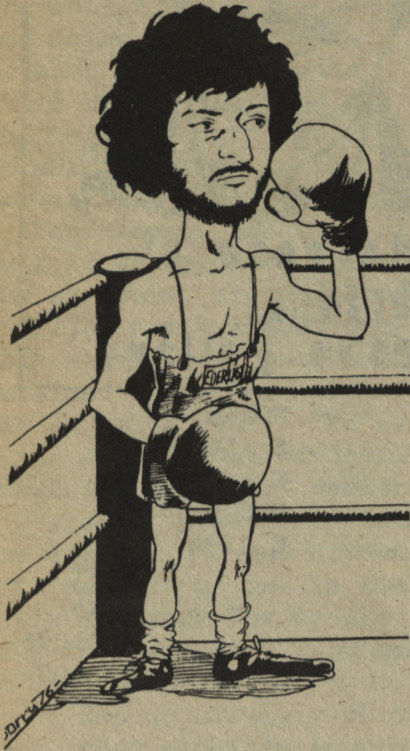


And In This Corner...



art-reddin

"His (the student's) imagination is "schooled" to accept service in place of value. Medical treatment is mistaken for health care, social work for the improvement of community life, police protection for safety, military poise for national security, the rat race for productive work. Health, learning, dignity, independence, and creative endeavor are defined as little more than the performance of the institutions which claim to serve these ends, and their improvement is made to depend on allocating more resources to the management of hospitals, schools, and other agencies in question."

Ivan Illich

These words are taken from the first page of De-Schooling Society. Their impact has been immense. It may sound crazy to suggest that in the area of educational reform, the publication of a single book could be a revolutionary event. In the context of such events as wide-spread student rebellion, extensive democratization of the universities, immense expenditures on new schools, riots over school conditions of the poor, sweeping liberal changes such as open area and non-gradedness, de-segregation, the Free (alternative) School movement and other major efforts in the last decade - in the context of all these events, to proclaim that a single book has had the most powerful effect of all may seem somewhat of an overstatement! But it isn't.

Well, what does De-Schooling Society say that has had such a profound effect on the educational reform movement? To oversimplify here, it says that schools, even the best ones are morally and ethically unjustifiable and must be dis-established along with the society they propagate. Chiefly schools stratify society, create a consumerism ethos in whatever country they are, and make people both in and out of school more stupid. I

wish to talk here of the second of these - consumer education.

In all countries of the world when learning is defined as compulsory using-up of structured curriculum and government officials attempt to compete at producing the most "well-educated" populace, schools bring with them a concept of man which is new to recorded history. The schooled man gives up his capacity to look after his own life - to entertain himself, to think, to communicate freely, to be able to console others, and all the many built-in abilities that tell him he is in charge of what he does and is important in his environment. With a schooled mentality, he wishes to be excused from life, to have his needs met by professional services and consumer goods, to increase his standard-of-living by becoming more passively cared for, entertained, and fed. He does not ask about life or how he can solve the vital problems around him; he asks only that his purchasing power be increased to allow him to consume more McDonald's hamburgers or buy a new car.

This change in man can be most easily seen in the Third World where schools cause massive social dislocation by creating demands for the consumerism of cities and service centers. Development planners assume that those who look after themselves by abilities and not purchasing power are deprived, and government policy further pushes towards dependency because of the increased economic wealth created by consumerable services. In Western society of course, mass advertized culture predominates. Everywhere in the world schools are the strongest weapons for changing people's life-styles.

To approach the dynamics of consumer education I find it useful here to use two headings - certification and compulsory attendance - without which you wouldn't have any school. With luck the aspects outlined will fit into these categories.

CERTIFICATION

Certification in the form of degrees, diplomas, etc. means that the student has successfully done some work outlined by curriculum planners. Everywhere that there is school students are striving to get higher certification - it is the Grade and not yet the Dollar that is Almighty. When exams roll around, all learning experience stops, no matter how worthwhile, and students feed back their consumed curriculum. I find it fascinating that our language clearly illustrates that certification means consumption of packaged curriculum. We can say "I'm here to get an education", but we don't say "I'm here to get a learning". Learning and education are two different varmins. It's been said (I believe it was Illich, again) that education is the packaged product of the school factory.

And we consume it extravagantly. We hardly notice or at least take for granted the increased expenditures for educational resources as we

move up the school ladder. We not only get more as we become more "educated", we expect to increasingly get more, not only within the school system but outside it as well. When affluence happens automatically and increases as we move to the next grade, we become accustomed to always having more.

Along this same line of thinking, assume for a moment that you have four thousand dollars to spend on learning for a year. Compare the possibilities with what you are presently offered at university.

The drop-out along the way understands of course that the school student receives much. He also understands that to overcome the label of second-class citizen that school bestowed on him he must compete along consumerist lines or else accept his drop-out status.

Finally, certification and the consumerism it creates is furthered by school when school advertises the certified society as the good life and offers degrees towards this. We all too readily accept at face value the claims offered in such advertising. Incidentally, there is a law suit on in the States charging schools with false advertising and deception in packaging.

COMPULSORY ATTENDANCE

Now to switch into the second main category - you guessed it - compulsory attendance (actually this will probably sound like more of the same jumble).

When a person is denied the right to refuse treatment directed at him many things can happen. One of the most powerful influences in consumer education is the replacement in young children of their driving curiosity and desire to learn with the process of being taught. As the quote at the first of this article suggests, it is not a big jump to assimilating the professional-client relationship into one's whole life-style. Certainly those who don't wish to or have become incapable of directing their own educational experience are common enough.

Good old authoritarian oppression with its particular type of dehumanizing teacher-student relationship can also be said to further the consumerism ethos. By overwhelming the student and turning him into an object, the oppressor-teacher erases any possibility that the student will be able to find security in himself, instead of in things, and leaves the student vulnerable and dependent on powerful materialist influences. A docile student is a good passive consumer and also an easy mark for the constant barrage of product advertising on the media.

The liberal trend towards more freedom in education has its own special effects as well. "Attendance as the result of seduction inculcates the need for specialized treatment more persuasively than reluctant attendance enforced by truant officers." Freedom has been translated to mean not human and civil rights for young people, but instead an ideology of free choice. Kids are free to choose program a, b, or c - in the same way



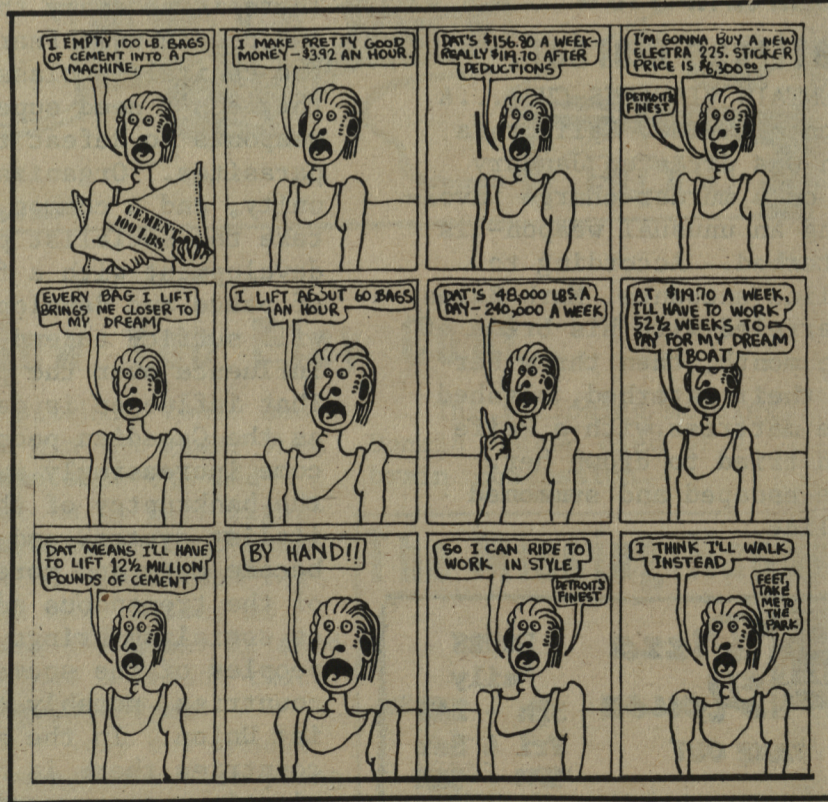
they can choose between brand x, y, or z in the super-market. They don't, of course, have the freedom of making their own option, or of not choosing option a, b, or c which are generally the same old shit anyway. But such reforms parade under the banner of freedom and humanism and we must praise them.

A fourth factor involved is that the student, during the years it is mandatory for him to attend, lives in a world which is wholly artificial. Man finds his humanness in his relation to nature and other men as a creator of culture and history. In the school world (as contrasted with "the real world outside") the student becomes useless. In northern Quebec the Innuits have refused to send any of their young people to school because they become incapable of looking after themselves away from that environment.

Finally, the high level of affluence in modern schools

influences the expectations of students. The middle-class teacher and norms of success further add to this as do conformity, competition, and other behavior patterns. In the large school where students are usually not well known to each other, personal status is often related to appearance and an amazing amount of time and money are spent on this.

Well, if anyone's been counting, that's about ten ways that schools produce consumers. Most of them apply directly to the consolidated schools, on P.E.I. It is really not surprising that the Island life style is being replaced and we are becoming more like Toronto or any other place. It is a direct conscious government policy that creates consolidated service centers and education. Unless we fight to regain our self-reliance we shall become ever more dependent on others and on a dehumanizing consumerism culture.



NEXT WEEK WILL BE THE LAST ISSUE OF THE CADRE FOR THIS YEAR.

ALL ARTICLES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS FOR SUBMISSION MUST BE IN BY
FRIDAY, APRIL 2ND, 5:00 pm.
