

Book Reviews

Two Dewey-eyed scholars

R. Freeman Butts.

**IN THE FIRST PERSON SINGULAR:
THE FOUNDATIONS OF EDUCATION.**

**San Francisco, CA: Caddo Gap Press, 1993.
101 pp. \$12.95.**

Boris S. Gershunsky.

RUSSIA IN DARKNESS. . . ON EDUCATION AND THE FUTURE.

**San Francisco, CA: Caddo Gap Press, 1993.
82 pp. \$12.95.**

Richard M. Weaver was right when he said ideas have consequences. A demonstration of this is Professor R. Freeman Butts' pamphlet, *In the First Person Singular*. This tract shows that the ideas hatched at Teachers College, Columbia University, following World War II removed the teaching of philosophy and metaphysics at Teachers College and replaced it with the more progressive "psychological and social foundations of education," which eventually helped destroy American education.

This book contains three previously unpublished papers about the origin and meaning of educational foundations, representing "three major generative periods of professional activity and writing in Butts' career in the foundations of education, each about two decades in length."

The first essay, "Reflections On Forty Years in the Foundations Department of Teachers College," deals with the years 1935-55. The second, "Teachers College and International Education," deals with the 1955-75 period. And the third, "A Civics Lesson for All of Us," deals with the period 1955 to the present. All three essays are about what Butts called "the tasks of the foundations of education."

Butts was there, so to speak, "at the creation," because the dismantling of philosophy and the establishment of the "foundations movement"

occurred at Teachers College in the 1930s, that low and dishonest decade on the left. Butts is one of the last remaining members of that demolition crew, so his essays are of historical interest. They show how the left perpetrated its scam through the use of euphemism, disguising its ideology as a new understanding of philosophy, now called foundations.

Butts was well-groomed for his task. In 1927 he went to that nest of radical anti-American social and labour history – the University of Wisconsin, where he did “interdisciplinary studies” under Professor Meiklejohn. There Butts was traumatized by the Great Depression, which shattered his faith in American democracy and capitalism. In 1932 he moved into the School of Education at Wisconsin, and amidst the education courses discovered not only “the new social history” of Charles and Mary Beard, Vernon L. Parrington, Arthur M. Schlesinger Sr., and Dixon Ryan Fox, but also the writers in *The Educational Frontier* – Wm. H. Kilpatrick, George Counts, Harold Rugg, Jack Childs, Bruce Raup, Ed Brunner, Goodwin Watson *et al.* John Dewey, the guru of the gang at Columbia, goes unmentioned.

In 1935, with his newly acquired Ph.D. from Wisconsin, Butts went to New York and Teachers College at Columbia to join these troublemakers in the recently formed Division of Foundations of Education. At Columbia he taught the required Education 200-F course, the transmission belt of foundation ideas. The emphasis was not to be on America’s achievement, accomplishment, and legacy, but rather on problems, conflicts, “contradictions in our culture” (read capitalism), and the aim of the course was “to deal with areas common to the various fields of educational endeavour and to provide them all with a basic understanding and a common outlook and language and discourse.” This was Teachers College’s version of educational “socialist realism” hidden behind words like “inclusiveness” (read real democracy), “integration” (read egalitarianism), “necessary orientation” (read laws of history), “common outlook” (read collectivism), “language and discourse” (read newspeak).

Outside the classrooms Teachers College was allegedly a bubbling cauldron, in which stewed a refreshing “conflict of ideas, activism and constant controversy.” In 1941 that objective scholar from the London School of Economics, Harold J. Laski, was a visiting professor at the school. Ironically, the idea of replacing philosophy with the “psychological and social foundations of education” was mapped out within the confines of the “Philosophy Club.” What was good for the goose was not good enough for the gander.

After World War II and the start of the Cold War the foundations idea became diluted. But by 1950 it was resurrected and reapproved by the department. The syllabus said: “The task of educational foundations

centres upon. . . a study of the *culture* and of human behaviour. . . the *total* educational enterprise. . . every teacher should understand. . . the conflicts in society. . . and be a professional *worker* in a democracy” (italics reviewer’s).

The question was: “What is the educational task in our culture?” To answer it foundations was to draw upon three resources: the University disciplines, community and citizen activities, and the institutions of education. These routes were to be “opened” to gain “educational direction and *power*.” Foundations was to deal with “policy in areas of unresolved problems in the culture. . . with the greatest possible commitment to democratic beliefs, purposes and goals. . . and the maximum possible community of understanding. . . as a means of redirecting the social and cultural role of education.

In other words, education was to be redirected. It was to turn away from the child and toward society. It was not to teach children to be good, but to reconstruct society to be egalitarian. It was education for social engineering.

The gang at Columbia defined the emerging trends and critical problems. Seven such problems cited were:

1. Achieving a stable peace in a divided world by *sharing the world with communism* and creating a world order based on diversity and pluralism. This was their version of the doctrine of moral equivalence between East and West.
2. The control of energy and resources in a civilization of rising industrialism. This was the programme for nationalizing production and setting “limits to growth.” Hence, socialism would catch up with capitalism and the two systems would converge.
3. The reconstruction of democratic theory. This was an acceptance of Lenin’s criticism of “formal democracy” in the name of “real democracy” based on “centralization, security and planning,” or wanting to replace the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie with the dictatorship of the proletariat.
4. New designs for the community based upon the appreciation of rural-urban conflicts and class-consciousness. This was their disdain for bourgeois nationalism and a preference for class-consciousness and patriotism for the proletariat.
5. New methods of learning. Individual pursuit of excellence and competition were to be replaced by “group learning, action and work as a creative experience.” In other words, socialist co-operation in education rather than capitalist competitiveness.
6. The reconstruction of personal relationships. Foundations was to “change family and sexual morality.” This was to replace traditional morality with a new morality by experimenting with the Ten Commandments.

7. Reorientation of outlooks. That meant “religious reconstruction and the reconstruction of philosophical outlooks based upon materialism, secularism and naturalism.” This was nothing short of brainwashing with John Dewey’s Humanist Manifesto.

Butts then gives a good example of double-speak disguised as candour. On the one hand, “We were by no means monolithic in our views, there were always sharp differences, but there was a kind of common furniture to our minds and outlook.” And on the other, “The ideology was predominantly reformist rather than neutral, value-laden rather than value-free, and possessing a humanitarianism committed to improve or alleviate the human condition through educational means. Our politics ranged from New-Dealism to Socialism.”

What a range! No wonder it was exciting. While the world was faced with Stalin and the Gulag these moral crusaders were making a tempest in a teapot about the senator from Wisconsin who knew only too well that many of the professors of his home state were up to. Perhaps, to use one of Karl Marx’s favourite phrases, “it was no accident” that Senator McCarthy developed an inordinate fear of communism in Butts’ home state of Wisconsin.

Butts says, “Our sympathies were with labour, the poor, the underprivileged – as we thought *all* teachers should be.” They are, Professor Butts, they still are.

The second essay deals with comparative and international education, in other words what one pundit called “globaloney.” We learn that Butts was the Father of Comparative International Education. Four brief observations about this essay.

First, this part (pp. 35-81) was a complete disaster because in my copy of the book pages 55-70 were simply missing. Second, still, I could surmise that, having realized that the American working class was not about to revolt and that America was not going to go socialist, Butts and Teachers College turned their attention to the underdeveloped Third World, or what Mussolini called “the proletarian nations.” Second, Butts describes his brief unsuccessful attempt to rename the teacher as an “educationary,” that is, a secular missionary decolonizing agent. Fortunately this failed. Third, Teachers College then concentrated on educating foreign students. By 1956 the number of foreign students was up to four hundred a year, which was twenty-five per cent of all foreign students studying education in the United States. They came from fifty-four different countries, the largest contingent being from Canada. (That’s how we became infected with the ‘foundations’ disease.) Fourth, most of

the conferences on educating the Third World that Butts attended seemed to have taken place in Aspen (Colorado), Hawaii, Australia, Japan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. As Professor David Lodge, a satirist of all things ludicrous in the education world calls it: "Nice work."

The last essay, first published in 1991, is really a senescent's plea to use the occasion of the American (1976) bicentennial as a "history and civics lesson" for all of us and to turn the United States of America into a classroom. Why? Because, says Butts, a guy like Robert Bork was nominated to the United States Supreme Court. Luckily he didn't make it. But unfortunately David Souter and Clarence Thomas did. And because the United States federal government does not do enough to alleviate poverty, unemployment, crime, insufficient health care, discrimination against minorities and women, and inequality in educational opportunity. *And* because the government does not do enough to enhance multiculturalism or to challenge the Western canon. I think you get the picture.

What I want to know is, with a record and ideas such as this, how did Butts end up at the Hoover Institution?

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Another tract from the Caddo Gap Press which recently landed on my desk is Boris S. Gershunsky's *Russia in Darkness. . . On Education and the Future*. His short (82 pp.) book and his so-called reformist ideas just confirm to me the damage done by the universal dissemination of John Dewey's secular-humanism, the educational philosophy Lenin imported from Columbia in the 1920s.

For whatever reason, Professor Gershunsky has written an unreadable book. Either his own English is wooden, or he had an awful translator. The book is a mix of the telling and the trivial, yet it addresses an intriguing subject.

The preface, written by Gerald H. Read, gives a historical sketch of the Gorbachev years up to the declaration of independence by the Russian Federation in June of 1991 and its enactment of a new education law to "departyize, decommunize, democratize, deideologize, demonopolize, decentralize and humanize the educational system."

Given this new dispensation, Gershunsky makes proposals for the future of Russian education. He begins with an open letter to Boris Yeltsin [*sic*] and speaks of the "callapsoidal state" that Russia is in and the deplorable situation in its schools. If Yeltsin is serious about reform he must become all the more so about education. In other words we have here the echo of H.G. Wells - "education or catastrophe?"

The introduction begins with a curious attack upon *Pamyat* (memory), the chauvinist, Slavophile, right-wing, anti-semitic movement that has reared its ugly head in post-Communist Russia. But while *Pamyat* must surely be of concern, it is hardly the biggest problem facing Russia. Already Russia has Zhirinovsky, who makes the *Pamyat* sound like an altar boy.

Then Gershunsky asks: "What has happened? Why has the mechanism of state self regulation disintegrated so quickly? What lies behind the in-depth processes of the crash of outwardly attractive socialist and Communist ideas?"

One is not sure if he is lamenting the disintegration of socialism or the fall of Gorbachev. Were Gorbachev's *glasnost* and *perestroika* too little too late or too much too early?

(Realizing this was not going to be an easy read I got myself a glass of vodka to help make the prose a little more penetrable just as Professor Gershunsky was about to provide what he called "an educational-politological analysis," and here is what I *think* it says.)

Education in what was the workers' homeland is backward. Educational achievement has decreased catastrophically because education has been "outside of priority spheres." I suppose this means government has not spent enough money on education.

The good professor elaborates five weaknesses in the educational system: schools are too isolated and remote from the frontiers of knowledge; not enough emphasis is put on vocational education, and the vocational education that exists is delivered poorly; there is no continuity or sequence in schooling; teacher training is nonexistent or inert; and, finally, there has been a general decline of interest in knowledge.

All this is aggravated by social pathologies such as: national rivalries and ethnic tensions; abject poverty; widespread crime; endemic immorality; apathy and cynicism; runaway alcoholism; the absence of a work ethic; irresponsibility; and, alas, materialism – not *dialectical* materialism, just materialism. In a word, Russia is deformed, or, as Gershunsky says, it is suffering from "foundational deformation."

Indeed, seventy years of Marxism produced only a totalitarian state which completely destroyed civil society and all the mediating institutions that once stood between the individual and the state. Life in Russia is truly "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short."

The only way out of this catastrophe is education. Gershunsky argues for more funding, better equipment and facilities and, over the course of a long and meandering discussion, he cites Thomas Kuhn and calls for a philosophical transformation, “a new paradigm” which will deideologize and humanize education and ground it in a “love of wisdom and the pursuit of truth.” Education must change from serving the needs of the collectivity and be based on the individual needs of students. And this must start now.

That’s how the book ends. It appears that he thinks if you espouse a little bit of something that sounds like individualism you will win your American audience and make your case and perhaps get a few speaking invitations. But “individualizing education” and making the case for individualism are hardly the same thing.

The redeeming feature of the book is its testimony about the catastrophe in Russia, which again shows our progressive educationists the utter havoc and ruination that Marxism (and that is “really existing Marxism”) has wrought. But Gershunsky’s outlook is still rooted in a statist, centralized, and secular vision. There is no mention of private education, church-run education, home-schooling, there is no discussion of the canon or the curriculum, and nothing about values or religion.

Paradigms do not evolve, amend themselves, or change. They get buried with their holders in the grave. So long as Russia does not go through a thorough process of decommunization, in effect burying it, there can be no change.

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William Hare.
WHAT MAKES A GOOD TEACHER?
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203 pp., \$20.95.

What makes a good teacher? Everyone understands that good teachers know their material, get along well with their students and make learning fun. William Hare, in his book, *What Makes a Good Teacher*, raises other issues that define “good” teachers. He discusses such virtues as humility, courage, open-mindedness that teachers must have.

This book raises the question of who should teach our children. Hare argues that the moral and ethical values that teachers should have,