BOOKS
Review Essay

Ravitch, Diane. *The Troubled Crusade: American Education, 1945-80.* New York: Basic Books, 1983. $19.95.

This book places coolly on record a tale of human folly, of dogmatic attempts to achieve inappropriate or impossible ends. There are many elements: characteristic twentieth-century hubris; intellectual authoritarianism; unwarranted dependence on the 'social sciences'; politicization of judgment; a utopian trust in human malleability. There is also a peculiarly American flavour: the assumption that nothing is to be learned from the experience of others, that 'the American way' is inherently superior (resting, ultimately, on the conversion of American history into mythology); the assumption that, in the game against nature that modern societies insist on playing, victories can properly be asserted on the basis of declarative statistics; a moralism that interprets untrustworthy policies as moral mandates, and relegates opponents to the status of moral inferiors; the zero-sum game of American conformity, which imposes grave penalties on losers ('winning is the only thing'), and encourages immoderate 'bandwaggoning': a partiality for hyperbole (and the exaggeration of minor achievements); the relentless 'selling' of plans, programs, 'systems', 'solutions', giving them an almost unstoppable momentum.[1]

From the viewpoint of an outsider, *The Troubled Crusade* might also be described as an account of the steadily more determined efforts, following 1945, to complete the Americanization of American education, bringing it into congruence with 'the American dream', and of the troubles to which this led - among them, eventually, the virtual dissolution of the 'liberal' American consensus and the loss of confidence both in the American public school and in the institutions that had prescribed the new educational order (Congress, the judiciary, the federal regulatory agencies).[2] The period during which the campaign was fully under way -from the mid-Sixties to the late Seventies - has been designated by one outsider, Paul Johnson, as that of 'America's suicide attempt'; and the educational changes that occurred, now by Americans themselves - the members of the President's National Commission on Excellence in Education - as comprising 'an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament.'[3]

It may seem strange to speak of the 'Americanization' of American education. However, in spite of the dismissal of the outside world by many Americans, the self-absorption,[4] American cultural life, in the non-anthropological sense, has until recently depended heavily on foreign importations (and in some areas, like serious music and the visual arts, still does).[5] This fact has been obscured by the record of economic success and technical ingenuity, and by the periodic manifestos of cultural independence. It is safe to say, nevertheless, that the prewar United States was, when compared with Central and Western Europe, in many respects culturally backward; as Gertrude Stein remarked, inimitably: 'Of course they all came to Paris a great many to paint pictures and naturally they could not do that at home, or write they could not do that at home either, they could be dentists at home.' It was not until the Thirties that Americans could be said to have ready to hand a native literature of any density. This explains why American children were brought up for so long on the English classical writers, and why, responding to the cultural lag of their audiences, talking pictures, for a decade and more after their introduction, drew heavily on classical and popular English literature, incidentally providing employment in Hollywood for a sizeable expatriate stock company of English actors. Large areas of science and intellectual speculation were similarly undernourished, and benefited immeasurably in the Thirties and Forties from the flood of refugees from Nazi Europe.[6]

This is not to deny the existence of powerful, interwoven, American intellectual traditions - naturalism, utilitarianism, scientism, practicality, and a collection of vague trends and preferences, usually described as 'democratic', for which populism seems as good a name as any. However, while these may serve well enough,

with churchgoing placed on the other side of the scales,[7] as an hypothetical footing for ordinary life, they are difficult to use as a foundation on which to build either educational policy of 'high culture' (generally found in close association, or although as twentieth-century statist educational experiments have demonstrated, the tie is not unbreakable). Nevertheless, they formed the hypothetical basis for the first thoroughgoing movement to Americanize American education, the movement that became known as 'progressive education'. Although the history of 'pedagogical progressivism' lies mainly outside her chosen period, Ravitch devotes a chapter to it,[8] and correctly so, because, despite its having fallen into disrepute as a comprehensive 'philosophy' by the early Fifties, its study throws a revealing light on certain persistent features of American education in modern times. Some matters are overlooked. There is no reference, for instance, to the growing importance of 'teacher education', which brought pressure on training institutions to present a coherent vision of educational purposes that, being inspirational, would prepare the ground for induction, while at the same time providing prospective teachers with a 'professional' vocabulary; since students were as a rule not drawn from among the most academically competent members of their generation (this became even more the case as young women gradually found other things to do),[9] there was much to be said in favour of a 'person-oriented' and 'democratic' doctrine (which inevitably took on a strong 'anti-intellectual', 'anti-elitist' tinge). Ravitch does make plain, however, the authoritarian (and even totalitarian) manoeuvrings that went on all too often behind the impressively humanistic verbal screen, eventually amounting to a dictatorship of the righteous. Critics were not tolerated; they were attacked by any means at hand, and silenced or excoriated; critics within the family were ostracized or ridiculed. The doctrine was spread systematically, and with enormous energy; the promotion of discipleship during training was clearly insufficient; superintendents were eagerly sought out, and encouraged to make over their schools as rapidly as possible; it was made evident to teachers, if necessary by dismissal, that opposition was impermissible.

It may be assumed that progressivism did not penetrate everywhere, and that many teachers gave it only lip service. And certainly the curriculum, which was on public display, was affected much more than classroom practice, which usually was not. An important sector of American education, the parochial schools, was left relatively untouched. Even so, the damage done can hardly be overestimated. This was not so much because of the ideas themselves, for which some kind of defence can be mustered, but because of the ways in which they were disseminated, which, besides imposing an unnatural rigidity on educational thought, reducing talk about education to an empty jargon, and allowing persons of extremely modest capacities to masquerade as 'leaders' and 'innovators', in the long run had the extraordinary effect of isolating educators both from popular opinion,[10] which was scarcely consulted, and intellectual opinion, which had been disdained (a minor consequence was the declension of teacher-education establishments to pariah status within American higher education). The pattern, once set, remained or reappeared to haunt American schooling. In the opinion of the reviewer, Ravitch accepts the thesis of the decease of pedagogical progressivism too easily.[11] 'Politically' exhausted, yes; intellectually corrupt, certainly; but, from the point of view of teacher-educators committed to the exposition of superficially coherent doctrine, or teachers in search of a public vocabulary, what was there to replace it? And if a replacement were found, what would be the consequences for them? Discredited or not, progressivism clearly retained the loyalties of many educators, eventually *merging with* what Ravitch calls 'the new progressivism'. Moreover, the authoritarianism, the uncritical espousal, the vulgarization, the intolerance of opposition were to be seen again.

Nevertheless, the period of the early Fifties to the early Sixties was a time of 'revisionism' in American education.[12] Even allowing for the apparent eclipse of progressivism, the reasons remain obscure. The exaggerated reaction to the Soviet space program (culminating in the National Defense Education Act) certainly played a part, as did exaggerated reports about the merits of Soviet education (which in fact had much in common with general European practice); but the new movement was on the way before Sputnik. Its manifestations were protean. Within the key institutions, the leading Schools of Education, 'research', 'scholarship', and the 'social sciences' suddenly became terms of magic - not, of course, without complaints from the old hands that the practicalities of school life were in danger of being overlooked. New careers sprouted. The Academy was in fashion again; determined efforts were made to get in touch. Technical philosophers, psychologists, sociologists, even economists and anthropologists - merely tolerated earlier, if 'on the strength'

at all - suddenly found themselves in a seller's market; not to be outdone, the direct teacher-trainers began to develop their own 'intellectuals'; educational administration became a central concern, and its programs too were 'intellectualized' (one suspects to the bewilderment of some of the students); administration began to take off as a distinctly separate career from teaching.[13] The old accord vanished as factions formed, each asserting its own right to make disciples. There was a great deal of 'action', with every group striving to be part of it. Funding was provided with a generosity never even imagined earlier - funding, however, not so much for the schools as for those who wished to change the schools. Intellectual development, the old emphasis of the opponents of progressivism, was the master concept; and it became an article of faith that, however teacher education was handled, the solution to problems ultimately did not lie there, but in rendering what was taught 'teacher-proof' by the provision of specifically mandated, extremely detailed teaching materials reflecting the best judgments of distinguished representatives of the 'disciplines' (as the term now was) found in the curriculum; there was much talk of 'teaching machines'. (Whatever its merits and justifications, this new approach rested on an extremely 'academic' and 'mechanical' representation of the American public school; as reformers were to discover, teachers are not so easily dealt out of the game). The 'research' and 'development' now so amply funded concentrated, then, on the curriculum, and within it on what was taken to be of central importance for modern life, the sciences, the 'social sciences', and mathematics.

As historians and sociologists have pointed out often enough, generalizations about the United States are apt to contain a large error component. One nevertheless has the impression of something unusual, of something that does not quite fit, in the curriculum reform movement and the associated 'intellectualization' of the period.[14] It has a quality of interlude, in some minds associated with the Eisenhower Years, and hence to be subsequently denigrated.[15] Ravitch tells us that, while the new initiatives in the presentation of the sciences were relatively successful, the new mathematics and the new 'social sciences' soon became unpopular. As in the case of 'pedagogical progressivism', however, 'intellectualization' did not die out, but remained to constitute another layer in the steadily more confusing ideological stratification of American education.

The Sixties (in practice extending from about the time of the first Kennedy assassination to that of the Nixon resignation), and the briefer Seventies are discussed by Ravitch at considerable length.[16] Educationally speaking, the Seventies (although in some ways a continuation of the Sixties) are the easier to interpret. They marked the pressing of the campaign for civil rights, aided by courts and legislatures, to the extreme boundaries of legitimacy, and often beyond, eventually well outrunning popular opinion; one saw again many of the features of the older progressivism, now with a stronger and more enduring political and social content, and rendered even more unpalatable by the persistent use of legal means to settle old scores. The black civil rights movement, because of its successes and even more because of the tactics of some of its later spokesmen - confrontation or 'contestation', extremeness of assertion, violence of language - became the model for a host of other movements, each with its own set of advocacy groups and wished-for clients, and each with a special interest in education, presenting in support of its claims whatever 'social-science' findings could be turned to use (but greeting other evidence with howls of rage).[17] Attention turned from blacks to Hispanics (somewhat complicated in this case by the presence of large numbers of immigrants with a preference for self-help and a rooted distrust of the State); to Amerindians; to any group in the population that could be classified as 'ethnic'; to women; to the clearly physically and mentally handicapped, and then to the presumptively handicapped (because of poor school performance); finally to homosexuals. As with the original model, there was usually a history of past neglect, or worse, to be made up for. Paradoxically, however, Americanization, the keeping of the promise, started to wear an anti-American countenance. Were the official avowals, the declarations looking forward to a more 'just' society, the stern rejections of 'racism' and 'sexism' (now very broadly defined), the adjurations to be 'compassionate', to be taken altogether at face value? What was on the real agenda? After all, a famous remark of the Sixties had been: 'The issue is not the issue.' And it was noticeable that adherents of 'the new progressivism' were anxious to assign virtuous intentions to foreign opponents of the United States, and prepared to overlook 'little local difficulties' like brutality, corruption, and totalitarian methods -which, at a pinch, could always somehow be laid at the door of 'imperialism', 'colonialism', 'neo-colonialism', the immorality of American power, or other such useful conceptions. The picture *was* confused, however, since education was the focus of concentration, and there the 'bandwagon' effect was in

full operation once again; it may also be assumed that those who authorized grants from governments or foundations, who were responsible for passing legislation or rendering judicial verdict, who edited academic journals or ran schools of education or school systems, were for the most part behaving in accordance with their scale of personal priorities, and not out of deep ideological commitment - bowing to apparent fashion 'astutely' paying danegeld, taking the path of least resistance (a continuation of the response of many American universities and colleges to their troubles of the Sixties). It was less a matter of conversion than of successful intimidation; in fairness, it should be added that the art of intimidation was by this time extremely well-developed. Ravitch testifies to the result: the wrapping of education in a net of legislation, the distortion of the curriculum (the downgrading of English, the imposition on everyone within reach of a set of uncriticizable ideas), the rapid expansion of administration, the increasing expense, the browbeating of recalcitrants, the attempts to make employment and enrolment patterns fit a statistical model of the populatiom, the monitoring of teacher behaviour, the drive for equality, preferably of results, at all costs. She suggests that this all came to a head during the Carter Administration, not because of any major new inititiatives, but because of the drafting of regulations to conform to, and indeed to take the fullest possible advantage of, legislation already passed.[18] A bureaucratic juggernaut was created. The growing prominance in the United States of early supporters of civil rights measures who have since decamped - as the consequences for education, and the character of government intervention, became obvious - is hardly surprising; much as in the case of 'pedagogical progressivism', the new progressivism collided with popular opinion - at the same time as its 'scientific' justifications began to seem trumped up; its advocates remain shrill and vigorous, but are more and more easily identified as partisans of some version of the ideological Left.

The Seventies, however, flowed out of the Sixties, and the Sixties in the United States - the revolt of youth, and its sponsorship by significant numbers of elders - are hard to explain. Idealism, nurtured in the civil rights movements, and inflamed by a wholly negative view of intervention in South-East Asia, certainly played a part. So did precocity: the breakdown of authority in sexual matters placed other kinds of authority in question. There were real grounds for complaint; much of the concern over the 'environment' and the heedless attitude of American business and industry to 'pollution' - although which arose, however, more from ignorance and limited perspective than from knavishness - was justified. There can be no doubt of the hostility to formal education and especially to anything that smacked of discipline or compulsion; 'freedom', 'openness', 'authenticity' - these were the key terms, and went along with a conviction of the superior vision, the uncorruptedness, of the young.[19] If we accept Schumpeter's analysis of capitalism, much of what happened was inevitable. Capitalism, he says, unavoidably sponsors an 'adversary culture' through education, particularly higher education;[20] and the United States had a very large proportion of the age cohort in attendance at universities and colleges. Some of its members put a shoulder to the door, tentatively at first, and it collapsed ('society' was to turn out a much tougher proposition).[21] The 'revolution' was more theatre than reality, however; it was not even 'modern', being reminiscent of nothing so much as the revolt of the young intelligentsia in late nineteenth-century Russia. And its foundations even among the young were insecure, since it was based predominantly in the elite universities, and there on a few fields of study; it would be hard to say that it ever captured a stable majority on any campus for an identifiable program; so far from there being a 'generation gap' (an idea fondly cultivated by the media), leaders typically came from 'liberal' or radical homes, a substantial number being of Jewish extraction; there was much talk of making contact with the working class and oppressed 'minorities', but little action; even on campus, radical blacks usually withdrew from collaboration with whites; although everyone seemed to have acquired a *marxisante*, 'radical chic' vocabulary, the dominant trend was relatively unambitious: the establishment of cultural enclaves for youth (an extension of the American high-school experience?).[22]

There has been a tendency, because campus turmoil in the United States ended so suddenly and unexpectedly, and media attention turned elsewhere, to dismiss it as having had negligible long-term consequences. This is a questionable judgment. Many curriculum requirements had been abolished. New programs with more political than academic content had been hastily established. New cultural styles had been widely diffused. Authority had been badly mauled. More important, a substantial group of students, later to move into education in one capacity or other (although seldom as regular school teachers), had been thoroughly 'radicalized'. It seemed that, as the Seventies wore on, the politicization of scholarly subjects, and the use of the classroom dais as

pulpit, had become accepted academic practice, with the elite institutions the worst offenders. Ravitch is sanguine, claiming that American higher education was in the long run not fundamentally damaged by the events that she describes so well; others are less sure.[23]

The Troubled Crusade is a work of considerable distinction, written by a scholar at the height of her powers and with unusual control of her material, and undisfigured by the nagging insistence on the supreme importance of social class that has made the books of a generation of American educationists such irritating reading. It neatly combines narrative and commentary in a manner that speaks of much attention and many drafts. It has so many merits that criticism seems churlish. One is disturbed, however, by Ravitch's final insistence that somehow all has been for the best, that all that has happened is explained by the overwhelming American reverence for education, and by her resort to a typically American device, the quotation of 'participation' and attendance statistics *simpliciter* as evidence of American educational success.[24] This may be why one commentator quoted on the back cover praises the book for its 'balance'. But does it qualify as the exercise of historical judgment? One has almost the impression of prudential afterthoughts, of protective hesitation. Certainly the material that she deals with will easily bear less soothing interpretations; another back-cover commentator uses the phrase 'a chilling account'.

The book carries a special, and very depressing, message for Canadian readers. To read it is to be made fully aware of the parasitical nature of Canadian education, and to wonder with growing perplexity how this intellectual emptiness, this lack of native-grown ideas, is to be explained. Almost without exception, every idea (more correctly every nostrum, every 'gadget') mentioned by Ravitch, from the days of 'pedagogical progressivism' to the present, has found a ready market in Canada, perhaps the most ludicrous example being the Canadian 'discovery' of the English primary school.[25] In another setting, this would be described as 'finlandization', except that, so far as the reviewer is aware, it is a matter of indifference to Americans whether Canadians borrow from them or not. No doubt it is partly explained by the presence in Canadian Faculties of Education of a sizeable group of expatriate Americans, heavily supplemented by Canadians with advanced degrees from American institutions (but this phenomenon itself needs explanation). In an article written some twenty years ago the reviewer remarked on what seemed to him the extraordinary emphasis on order, control and hierarchy in Canadian education, and on the correspondingly elevated status accorded to administration.[26] The answer may lie here. Ideas are more controllable when imported; an administrator who is fast on his feet may even get to them before any of his underlings; ideas invented at home are more troublesome, especially because of the competitive status acquired by their originators.

NOTES

1. Although *The Troubled Crusade* is, formally speaking, about education, students of American participation in the Second World War will recognize the same characteristics. Obscured by victory, they returned to paralyse the American cause in Vietnam.

2. The media should not be ignored here. By 1981 American respect for the press had fallen, according to the polls, to its lowest level ever, a positive rating being obtained in one poll from only 13.7% of those sampled (for television, which in news and public-affairs programs had encouraged the reformers, the figure was 12.7%, only just ahead of that for Congress itself).

3. For 'America's suicide attempt' see Chapter 18 in Paul Johnson's *Modern Times: the World from the Twenties to the Eighties* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983). The Commission is quoted in 'The Excellence Backlash: Sources of Resistance to Educational Reform', Chester E. Finn, Jr., *The American Spectator*, September 1984, pp. 10-16.

4. David Riesman refers wryly at one point to 'the Great American Parish, the province of provinces.'

5. And see, for architecture, Tom Wolfe, *From Bauhaus to Our House* (New York: Farrar-Straus Giroux, 1982).

6. See D. Fleming & B. Bailyn (eds.), *The Intellectual Migration: Europe and America*, 1930-1960 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969).

7. Gertrude Stein again: 'I was there to kill what was not dead, the nineteenth century which was so sure *of evolution and prayers.*' (Italics mine: JM). Unfortunately the nineteenth century is still with us.

8. Ravitch, op. cit., pp. 43-80.

9. As the century progressed a trend became apparent which eventually could be called 'a flight from teaching'. Fewer American college freshmen now choose teaching as a career than at any time in the last thirty years. Their measured academic aptitude is lower than that of students in any other field except ethnic studies. Of those already teaching, almost half report that, if they had the choice to make again, they would choose differently.

10. Where education is concerned, popular opinion requires close interpretation. Many adults have little to do with schools, but, because of the widespread assumption that education is an unassailable good, are well disposed to them in a general way. This accounts for the historically high level of support shown in polls. The substantial erosion of support in recent American polls, though still leaving public schools apparently more favoured than other American institutions, is thus an extremely significant finding. In September 1983 Gallup found that 51 per cent of Americans (and 63 per cent of blacks) favoured using tax funds to allow parents to select from among public, parochial, and private schools. Clearly, also, dissatisfaction has gone well beyond the expression of opinion. In the last twenty years some ten thousand new evangelical Christian day schools have been established - the first major secession from the public system since the Roman Catholic 'disruption' of the nineteenth century.

11. 'It died', she says, 'because it was, ironically, no longer relevant to the times.'(p.79).

12. Ravitch, *ibid.*, pp. 228-233. For once the treatment is inadequate.

13. It may be surmised that much of the 'intellectualization' was what has been described as 'the intellectualization of the mundane'.

14. For an extended account of American attitudes to intellectual performance see C. Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism* (New York: Norton, 1979)

15. In some American circles Republican Presidents are now regarded as non-legitimate (much as a Democratic President, FDR, was regarded in the Thirties).

16. Ravitch, *ibid.* (primarily in Chapters 6, 7 and 8).

17. The successes of the black civil rights movement were primarily educational. A new, young, black, bourgeoisie was created, whose members shortly began to show annoyance with those who took their politics for granted. For many other blacks the end of enforced segregation was far from bringing economic wellbeing - a fact attributed by two prominent black economists, Walter Williams and Thomas Sowell, to foolish welfare and labour legislation (especially minimum-wage laws).

18. Ravitch, *ibid.*, Chapter 8 ('The New Politics of Education').

19. Ravitch, *ibid.*, pp. 235-256.

20. See J.A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York: Harper, 1954).

21. Canadian universities owe a good deal here to Sir George Williams University, which, when faced with similar disturbances during this period, behaved with a principled firmness.

22. The judgment of the American Marxist historian, Eugene Genovese, on the 'radical' students is worth pondering. He described them as 'pseudo-revolutionary middle-class totalitarians' (quoted by Ravitch, p.227).

23. See, for example, A.B. Ulam, *The Fall of the American University* (New York Library Press, 1972).

24. See, in particular but not exclusively, 'Epilogue: from 1945 to 1980', pp. 321-330.

25. Ravitch's treatment of the American 'discovery' is mildly sardonic (Chapter 7, passim).

26. See 'The Social Ideas of Canadian Educators', J. Macdonald, *Comparative Education Review*, Vol. 9, #1 (February, 1965), pp. 38-45.

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Tkach, Nicholas, *Alberta Catholic Schools . . . A Social History* Edmonton: Publication Services, Faculty of Education, University of Alberta, 1983, 385 pp., $12.00 (Paper)

In the past fifteen years Canadian educational historians have produced exceedingly few book length monographs in their field. The causes vary, but most relate to the revolution in the historiography of education which has been underway for most of that period. As educational historians began to act like "real" historians and even to influence the direction of mainstream history, and as the intricacies of the new social history unravelled, two outcomes became increasingly apparent. The first was that many educational historians became obsessed with the context which shaped their work - be it the history of ethnic studies, of children, agriculture or women - and slipped almost imperceptibly into what were formerly fringe areas of educational history. Judging from some recent essays in the historiography of education, there is considerable confusion about what now constitutes educational history, and who among the former faithful are still in the fold. A second result has been a great augmentation in standards that the academic community now expects of educational historians. The move into social history, and more and more quantified social history, has intensified this trend, and has demanded a seven fold increase in an effort to produce an acceptable piece of scholarship. The result has been that the new breed of educational historian often revels in minutiae, and cringes at the prospects of ever producing a monumental provincial history of education or, God forbid, a Canada wide monograph on the subject.

When it comes to writing provincial and national histories of education it is almost as though educatioal historians have self imposed the labors of Sisyphus, for the tyranny of recent historiographical developments has almost demanded that they write "total" history, that they pursue every stitch of context, and that they seek out every nuance in the half dozen or so fields into which educational history has subdivided. Add to these impositions the intrinsically more difficult preoccupation of writing history from the bottom up, and it should be apparent why "macro" histories of education in this country have been few and far between. The task, quite frankly, is intimidating.

Despite these obstacles, Nicholas Tkach has written a province-wide history of Catholic schools in Alberta. Divided into ten chapters, the study begins with the North West Territories, considers the efforts of missionaries, and then five periods of Alberta history, before discussing the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association and its blueprint for the future.

One of the most useful chapters deals with the Alberta Catholic Education Association (ACEA), an oganization formed in 1947 to protect long standing Catholic rights and to promote parity with the public system. The creation of the large school divisions in the thirties and forties had facilitated the closure of many small Catholic districts, the bussing of their students to centralized, secular schools, and the redirection of Catholic assessment toward the secular system.

The best integration of Tkach's own research relates to the development of the Alberta curriculum which he studied as a graduate at The University of Montana in Missoula. The book provides a very rich collection of Alberta source material ranging from statistics on immigration, population, economic production, divorce, and drug abuse, to segments from the ACEA Bulletin, courses of study and several ordinances.

The book also contains an epilogue which details the work of the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association (ACSTA) in fostering Catholic education. This work has included the development of a spirit to