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FOR POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC REALISM

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Education

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In an earlier article (*The Social Creditor*, June 24, 1950) I attempted to begin clearing the ground for a more exact consideration of this much vaunted panacea, or article of popular faith. I pointed to an essay written fifty years ago by Remy de Gourmont in which he emphasised that education is a means and not an end, and that though it might be the condition of certain intellectual achievements, applied to the second rate brain it merely diverts from the needs of life activities meant for daily exercise. The excess pre-occupation with "careers" and "getting to the top of the tree," to which attention has recently been drawn, is related closely to the infiltration into our Universities of the "German-American" University system. It is also connected with the almost automatic process which now seems to direct an "educated" man's attention and discussion away from objectives and rivet them on the technicalities of methods. I call the system "German-American" because Germany seems to have been the place where this technique of directing the attention of potentially intelligent men away from matters which might embarrass the powers that be, was first employed, and America is the place where its present practice and results can be observed in their most extreme form. The identification of the American system, by one who had been through it without becoming part of it, as an integral part of the system built by the then enemy, Germany in the Bismarkian tradition, formed the basis of four articles by Ezra Pound in *The New Age* in 1917. The title, "Provincialism the Enemy," dependent on the tradition of a particular group of ideas which Flaubert had built up round the word "Provincialism," may be misleading to us at first sight. The expression "a province of knowledge" should be sufficient indication of the type of thing to which he was referring—his meaning is made perfectly clear in the following extracts, which, placed in the immediate context of the "education" and "career" problem, have the significance which was perhaps not apparent to the original readers. Their length will not need excuse to anyone interested in the subject:—

"Now apart from intense national propaganda, the 'university system' of Germany is evil. It is evil wherever it penetrates. Its 'universal pervasiveness' is a poisonous and most pestilent sort of pervasiveness. The drug is insidious and attractive.

"It is, as Verhaeren said, the only system whereby every local nobody is able to imagine himself as somebody. It is in essence a provincialism. It is the 'single' bait which

caught all the German intellectuals and which had hooked many of their American confrères (even before exchange professorships had set in).

"Its action in Germany was perfectly simple. Every man of intelligence had that intelligence nicely switched on to some particular problem, some minute particular problem unconnected with life, *unconnected* with main principles (to use a detestable, much abused phrase). By confining his attention to ablaunts, hair-length, foraminifera, he could become at small price an 'authority,' a celebrity. I myself am an 'authority'; I was limed to that extent. It takes some time to get clean.

"Entirely apart from any willingness to preach history according to the Berlin party's ideas, or to turn the classroom into a hall of propaganda, the whole method of the German and American higher education was, is, evil, a perversion.

"It is evil because it holds up an ideal of scholarship, not an ideal of humanity. It says in effect you are to acquire knowledge in order that knowledge may be acquired. Metaphorically you are to build up a damn'd and useless pyramid which will be no use to you or anyone else, but will serve as a 'monument'; to this end you are to sacrifice your mind and vitality. . . .

"Knowledge as the adornment of the mind, the enrichment of the personality, has been cried down in every educational establishment where the German-American 'university' ideal has reached. The student as the bond-slave of his subject, the gelded ant, the compiler of data has been preached as the *summum bonum*. . . .

"This is the bone of the mastodon, this is the symptom of the disease; it is all one with the idea that the man is the slave of the state, the 'unit,' the piece of the machine. Where the other phase of the idea, the 'slave of the state' idea has worked on the masses, the idea of the scholar as the slave of learning has worked on the 'intellectual.' It still works on him.

"No one who has not been caught young and pitchforked into a 'graduate school' knows anything of the fascination of being about to 'know more than anyone else' about the sex of oysters or the tonic accents of Aramaic. No one who has not been one of a gang of young men all heading for scholastic 'honours' knows how easy it is to have the mind

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switched off all general considerations of the values of life, and switched on to some minute, unvital detail.

"This has nothing whatever to do with the 'progress of modern science.' There is no contradicting the fact that science has been advanced, greatly advanced, by a system which divides the labour of research and gives each student a minute detail to investigate. But this division of the subject has not been the sole means of advance and by itself it would have been useless. And in any case it is not the crux of the matter. The crux of the matter is that the student, burying himself in detail, has not done so with the understanding of his act. He has not done it as a necessary sacrifice in order that he may emerge.

"In the study of literature he has buried himself in questions of morphology, without even thinking of being able to know good literature from bad. In all studies he has buried himself in 'problems' and completely turned away from any sense of proportion between the problems and vital values. In most cases the experiment has been merely blind experiment along a main line, in accord with a main idea *dictated* by somebody else. The student has become accustomed first to receiving his main ideas without question; then to being indifferent to them [one is familiar with the impatience which vents itself in such remark as 'blatantly obvious' when any basic statement concerning reality is emphasised for the purpose of argument in a discussion—G.S.] . . . in this state he has accepted the idea that he is an ant, not a human being. He has become impotent and quite pliable . . . his mind is prepared for all sorts of acts to be undertaken for exterior reasons 'of State,' etc. [because they are 'scientific'—G.S.] without regard to their merit.

"I have no objection to any man making himself into a tank or refrigerator for as much exact information as he enjoys holding. There may even be a sensuous pleasure in such entangling, but a system which makes this entangling not only a *sine qua non*, but a fetish, is pernicious. . . .

"The uncritical habit of mind spreads from the university to the press and to the people. I am well aware that this uncritical habit of mind is hidden by an *apparatus criticus* and by more kinds of 'criticism' and talk about

criticism than the man in the street has heard of. But it is for all that uncritical. It divides facts into the known and the unknown, the arranged and the unarranged. It talks about the advancement of learning and demands 'original research,' i.e., a retabulation of data, and a retabulation of tables already tabulated. . . . It leads in general to an uncritical acceptance of any schematized plan laid down by a higher command of one sort or another. These things have their relative 'use' or convenience, or efficiency, but their ultimate human use is nil, or it is pernicious."

Also in the same series of articles Ezra Pound brings forward an interesting piece of evidence to illustrate the mentality of the operators of such a system. "Shaw," he says, "slips into the 'kultur' error when he speaks of a man being no use until you put an idea inside him. The idea that a man should be used 'like a spindle' instead of existing, like a tree or a calf, is very insidious.

As a postscript to these articles the 'Press Cuttings' column of *The New Age* for May 19, 1921, reprinted a paragraph from the *New York Herald* (Paris) reporting Ezra Pound's arrival in Paris and his comment:—"England, largely insensitized, is suffering from the same poison that exists in German 'kultur' and in the American University system, and which aims at filling a students' head full of facts to paralyse him with data instead of developing his perspicacity. . . . It is one result of the war which has had its most serious effect in this weakening of civilisation. . . . The situation is evident in the fact that England has not yet noticed the one real contribution to creative thought which has been made in five years. It is found in Major C. H. Douglas's book, published some months ago, *Economic Democracy* . . ."

The fruits of this alien influence on our educational institutions were already there to be judged and it is hardly surprising that many Social Crediters have suspected a more *direct* control over the Universities by the powers that be than probably exists. There are many elements in English University life which have their roots in a healthier conception of education than that by which it is being swamped. They are felt as natural rather than understood, such as the tutorial system which instead of forcing a man to spend his time receiving potted knowledge from lectures enables him to spend his time looking for the books of his own age, or from any other, which are most congenial to his own development. There is of course the "syllabus" which often forces one to "tank up on tosh" without having any knowledge of the "classics" or main works of literature against which the second-rate can be measured. But the time is no more suitable for writing a new syllabus than it is for writing a new constitution. The more general courses which are often suggested to cover something of the field now covered by "Greats," "Modern Languages" and "English Language and Literature," far from being in opposition to the German-American system, would, in the present circumstances, help to extend it. In order to cover the wider field in the time and acquire the type of knowledge that can be measured by examinations, the student would be more dependent on the collecting together of second-hand opinions, on having the writings of other ages "interpreted" by his contemporaries and less time to examine

for himself the more important of the "few thousand battered books" which symbolise his civilisation. At the moment the detailed study of English Language and Literature from the eighth till the twentieth century, with at least half of the time spent on pre-reformation writing, is bound to present the student who has the germs of intelligence with statements about reality which are not contained in and which often contradict the statements that are taken to be representative of contemporary mentality.

The number of people who can escape from a "provincialism in time" to the more universal conception which must have originally been implied in the term "University" is probably not very large and the P.E.P. report on the Universities seems to be deliberately dragging a red herring across the trail when it remarks on the "lack of places in the older Universities occupied by the sons of manual labourers," implying a return on its own part to the belief in hereditary principles—and of course that it wants to see more hack work being done in places already containing too high a percentage of hacks.

This high percentage has swamped the rest to the extent of being able to give the impression in most circles that *IT* is the system and that its activities *ARE* education. From this spreads the inability to see any connection between education (since it only connotes these activities) and a binding back of policy to reality, also an indifference towards whoever runs the thing (seen only as something mechanistic) and a growing tendency to regard any assimilation of data to an outlook on life—whether good or bad is not questioned—as a 'bias' to be lumped indiscriminately with every other 'bias' as excrescences to scholarship. The large section of the population also undergoing technical training adds to the confusion. By appropriating the term 'education' to denote its activities it further reduces it to notions of 'fact collecting' and training for a 'career' and reinforces the idea that the "Arts" man is also doing his technical training necessary to teach or to enter a government department or industry which values a mind in which the reasoning faculty has been trained to amass and to 'organise' heterogeneous data, without turning round and asking such awkward questions as, "why?"

What has been happening then is that the idea of education has gradually been scaled down from something we must look for when we ask, "What is education?" "Why were Universities first instituted?" to a mechanical operation similar to that of barrow-pushing or organ-grinding and probably well below that of cabinet-making or any occupation that requires skill. Hence the filling up of Universities at greater speed by people only capable of performing mechanical or repetitive processes until the government, as representative of the powers that be, is willing to subsidise these old foundations extensively as a possible means of inculcating the few intelligent beings, swamped in the midst of many who "know lots and lots," against applying their brains to anything important. That education is synonymous with a tanking up process, in the minds of most of the people that talk about it, is further borne out by the description in a recent issue of *The Radio Times* of a Third Programme talk on "attempts to have 'a high standard of education' at the same time as allowing the child the greatest scope of self development" thereby showing

that the speaker regards the two as opposites, the reconciling of which will enable him to perform tightrope antics of reasoning.

Professor Tolkien recently remarked on the difficulty of attempting to explain, purely by means of the written word, even such a simple operation as cutting a piece of paper with a pair of scissors—to someone who had never seen or heard of anything like a pair of scissors. One can see the equal difficulty in trying to teach someone to think if thinking were an alien process to him. When Ezra Pound in *How to Read* listed the Odyssey, the Four Books of Confucius, The Divine Comedy, the works of Cavalcanti, The Provençal Troubadours, Villon and Flaubert as being among the basic 'musts' in the syllabus of any intelligent man who wished to become 'educated,' to be able to measure one book against another, to be let loose, without risk of overbalancing, in all the latest phases and cults of modernity, he seems to have had two kinds of retort. One based on the, "I'm educated but I haven't read and none of my intellectual friends have read . . . and you expect us to spend time on translations when there are ORIGINAL things in our own language. . . ." The other reply more patiently says, "Supposing you provide the populace with a grounding in the matter of these books, how many, judging by the response of most of those who do read them at the moment, are going to be any the wiser?"

Here we are back again at the problem of personnel. The last reaction seems based on the view that the present occupants and numbers of occupants of the Universities are an invariable factor in the situation. Given a university population most of whom show no signs of being able to think, and the experience that to teach thinking is impossible, the educator turns round to find something he can teach. There is probably also an element of the equality principle and 'democracy morality' which feels it right to teach the type of thing offering an 'equality of opportunity' to the taught.

"Democracy morality" has also obscured the importance of having Statesmen for the well-being of a country. The political governments and their university-trained bureaucracies of the present century have clearly shown that the type of mind suited to arranging and ruthlessly simplifying data, in a laboratory or library, to a pattern which can be comprehended in a reasoned system, is not suited to the administrative tasks that go with government. The type of mind that understands the management of horses, even though its conversational abilities may make it less attractive from the point of view of companionship, has the qualities and experience better fitted for administration, which requires extensive dealing with human beings.

It seems therefore a primary requirement of an education system that it shall be the prop available to this last-mentioned type of intelligence. The criticism that one hears levelled against the "bad old universities" of such times as the 18th Century because they were "prerogatives of the upper classes and the aristocracy," are based on a conception of education as an end-product that "ought to be shared," etc. It ignores the more important point that the good management of the country's affairs is likely to be assisted if those destined to be at the helm have had the right sort of education. One feels that as with the principles of asso-

ciation, the business of getting the right people into the universities, and the converse, is the best part of the way toward getting the right syllabus and the right sort of education. It must be remembered that the mere bringing into contact with each other of young and active minds in surroundings where important questions are continually discussed, where it is the convention that they are the main part of the day's social conversation, is practically half what even to-day constitutes a good university education. A glance at the type of education given by the Roman Catholic Church to those destined to fill important positions in its hierarchy, which certainly has little to do with the amassing of heaps of disconnected scholarship that may or may not be useful to someone else, should give some idea of the quality and range of the education system that ought to be available to secular administrators and potential statesmen. It may also be worth hazarding a suggestion that it was this fact of the Church hierarchy alone being educated, in any real sense of the word, that led to the widespread use of Churchmen in the later middle ages as civil administrators, hence to a greater confusion of the functions of power and authority, and to the attempt of the secular power to arrogate to itself both functions at the reformation. In England before the conquest, the situation had been simplified by the existence side by side of two distinct kinds of learning: the written learning of the Latin world which was the study of the priesthood and the unwritten learning of Germanic traditions including its epic poems, ideals of right action and loyalty to one's lord, and principles of common law, which was the province of the aristocracy. Not that the two traditions never made contact—all our written records of Old English literature and laws are evidence of that contact, the adaptation of the Latin alphabet and habit of expressing vocal noises as marks on parchment to the Germanic oral traditional learning. The important point was that, however much they may have been interactive and necessary to one another in Old English civilisation, they were felt as distinct and their separate functions instinctively perceived.

This idea of an aristocratic lore and tradition is not, I think, to be relegated to the category of "curiosities in history books." I take it that most Social Crediters have a clearer picture of what is meant by an "aristocracy" than the popular one—"part of that heterogeneous collection which fills the 'Society' pages in newspapers." If one thinks of certain families which have transmitted from generation to generation a culture and at the same time provided the surroundings that have been found by experience most congenial to the natural growth of their own sons to their full stature, one can understand the different results of these people coming into contact with a written tradition from those of the mechanically-minded parchment-fingerers who only see written matter as stuff to be filed in different compartments of the mind. There is an element of having had to have lived a part of the cultural tradition one is seeking in books, in order to give life to the latter, so that it can be understood and assimilated. One must perceive that the living tradition must exist side by side with but not too dependent on the written tradition in order that the latter may fulfil its function, (a fact ignored by the Protestant reformers who wished to make do with the Bible) so that the accumulated heritage of experience which the tradition contains may be applied in the right way to situa-

tions in the present. Its existence is a necessary condition of the teaching of the rudiments of a culture—the living model must ever be kept in view.

In a series of articles written for *The New Age* in 1919 under the title "The Regional," Ezra Pound makes among other things two points in connection with the idea of aristocracy as a model and therefore as a necessary part in any process of education.

"Wholly 'unjust' concentrations of power (£ s. d.) have undoubtedly helped civilisation." (It might be emphasised that *The New Age* at that time represented a Socialist outlook which would have tended to regard all unequal distributions of property as "Unjust concentration of power," and was not particularly concerned with the distinction, now important to us, between ownership of property and estates, and the concentrations of financial and political power, which the Social Credit movement and Ezra Pound himself have subsequently done much to clarify.) "It is their function to provide models, to set standards of living apparently unattainable for all . . . only in the rarest of cases has a collective administration attained any state of discrimination comparable to that enforced by individuals Whatever be the 'catch' in over-production [one might here point for further definition to the chapter on 'what is enough' in *The Elements of Social Credit*.—G.S.] it is the duty of a sane manufacturing system to 'over-produce' every luxury which tends to increase the comforts and amenities of existence. . . . The function of an aristocracy is largely to criticise, select, castigate luxury, to reduce the baroque to an elegance. . . . A fine model of life as of architecture, or in the arts, has its value, and any real system of sociology, as opposed to a doctrinaire system must recognise this value and its nature."

The concentrating of power (£ s. d.) in a different type of hands from those of a traditional aristocracy, or capable of being assimilated to that aristocracy, and on a scale exceeding that which was associated with the later days of the Roman Empire, has been instrumental in setting up a different type of model of living, which has served as a model even for many of the families that would otherwise have been models in their own right. The baroque, far from being "reduced to an elegance" by the "film-star" patrons of luxury, has run riot.

More education of the German-American kind, far from assisting in the establishment of the correct principles of association, will only lead away from them. Also, since a good and effective system of education is dependent on the application of those principles to the society in which we live, no consideration of the idea, the function, or systems of education which does not lay due emphasis on this relationship and on the principles themselves, can hope to be more than a rearrangement of data within the closed walls of the German-American system for which it will undoubtedly be speaking. (Concluded.)

Erratum

In our issue of May 17, page 4, column 2, line 8 appeared "widespread belief in immorality." This should, of course, have been "immortality."