

Humanising education (2)

Professor Mark Slouka, cited here recently, is an award-winning teacher and writer. He directs the writing program at the University of Chicago, where the Encyclopedia Britannica has had its headquarters for the past century. Originally published in Edinburgh, it is now another U.S. global enterprise.

The 'Britannica' surveys the whole domain of human knowledge in 32 volumes, eight more than the 24 I purchased 40 years ago. Prof. Slouka thinks that with the proliferation of technology our educational institutions have been 'dehumanised'. The 'literati' who read and experience the world directly through travel and face-to-face encounters are being replaced by the 'digitati' who 'know' what buttons to push and the right films to watch.

The on-screen images include the jumbo-trons that lecture to hundreds of students, most of whom never speak personally to the professor.

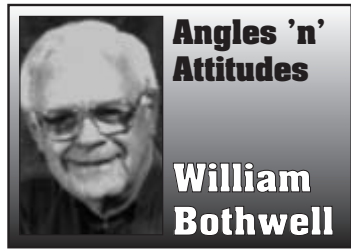
Slouka, say his critics, underestimates the benefits of technology when he claims that we shall soon be unable to distinguish what is real from what has been created by film makers and propagandists. It will be unfortunate when the average university graduate has been trained mainly in the pure and natural sciences with little or no education in the humanities. It will be worse when most of what any of us thinks about has been generated either by Hollywood or by the 'mavens' of the global advertising industry.

Gertrude Stein was once asked why she valued a painting more than a string of pearls. She replied that she preferred something made by a man to something made by an oyster. Technology is the work of men and women, but education that is dominated by the use of machines or gadgets is dehumanising. For almost a century people have been of two minds about the advance of technocracy (rule by machines). Those who are adept at manipulating them simply follow orders as did those who wielded axes and shovels in another age. Is their work to be valued above that of thinkers and reformers?

When machines create pictures, write poetry, produce music and do our thinking for us, will George Orwell's "1984" have arrived, albeit belatedly? Will a microchip imbedded in each newborn moni-

tor one's whereabouts throughout life, and will statutory surveillance devices in every room and vehicle make all activity subject to random inspection by Sûreté Centrale? Those who invent, market, install and service those machines will not wish to protect us against them. Who will speak for freedom and privacy?

Prof. Slouka says that educators are overly concerned to produce trained 'peasants' (the corporate designation) like those now proliferating in South East Asia, who will serve their corporate masters.



Angles 'n' Attitudes

William Bothwell

The modern counterparts of Croesus, about whom Ralph Nader writes in his new novel *Only the Super-Rich Can Save Us*, dominate governments and institutions. Ergo, they influence the kind of education they say we need. The super-rich should, according to Nader and Moore, be enlisted to help solve the social and political problems generated by capitalism.

In the first chapter of the novel Nader imagines Warren Buffet, the \$46 billion man, warning his fellow plutocrats that "the world is not doing well. Artificial intelligence is on a fast track to dehumanising us. As a species we are learning more and more but are less and less able to keep up with what's happening to us as human beings". And that, says Nader, is at a time when we have more powerful tools than ever before because of "the proliferation of facilitating technologies".

The current relationship between industry and education, says Slouka, is like that between Walmart and its suppliers. Boards of education, in order to meet their payrolls, will have increasingly to please the corporate barons by what they teach. A cartoon comes to mind in which an aircraft passenger grasps the arm of a priest sitting beside him. Outside the window, lightning flashes and the interior of the plane gives evidence of severe turbulence. "Can't you do something, Father?" asks the worried passenger. The cleric replies, "Sorry, I'm in sales, not in

management".

Are our educators focussed on selling what the global merchants are intent on managing? Are they forgetting that the transmission of our culture is as important as the expansion of our economy?

The Globe and Mail reported (Social Studies column, September 30) that German physicians have launched a Culture Shot programme to supplement the physical health of children. Youngsters leave a doctor's appointment with complimentary theatre and museum tickets. Dr H.J. Kahl of Düsseldorf called it "cultural prevention" that promotes a healthier way of life.

Mark Slouka says that today's teachers are being hired to produce a generation of corporate serfs rather than free men and women who enjoy the fullness of life by drawing from the deep wells of history, literature and the arts. Would a local trustee or school principal care to comment?

In his new film, "Capitalism: a Love Story" Michael Moore says that capitalism is a system of legalised greed that flouts democracy and demeans people. "We're going to have to invent a different kind of economy based on democratic principles and with an ethical core," he says. That conclusion should surprise no one. Catholic social teaching has been saying so for years. It rejects the capitalist myth that an unregulated market produces the greatest good for the greatest number. Google "Leo XIII's Rerum Novarum (1891)" and "John Paul II on Capitalism".

Neither our political freedom nor our cultural enrichment are automatic results of a growing economy. Quite the opposite.

Prof. Slouka quotes Thomas Friedman, a New York Times columnist and a member of the Pulitzer Prize Board, as saying that high schools as we know them are obsolete. British author and critic David Lodge writes that it is the universities and schools that properly prepare young people for that in an impending new Dark Age must keep civilisation alive. They should not have to justify their existence by spreadsheets.

Education and job training are both important but they are not the same thing. "Beware", said Plato, "when profit-seeking entrepreneurs (his "men of iron") rule the state". Or the schools.

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But why bother with the truth, eh Jack?

When Prime Minister Stephen Harper surprised and apparently delighted a high-end audience by playing the piano and singing at Ottawa's National Arts Centre gala on the weekend alongside renowned cellist Yo-Yo Ma, his choice of the Beatles' classic "With A Little Help From My Friends" surely couldn't have been an accident.

To be sure, Harper's wife Lauren, who was honorary chair of the event, told reporters there was "no big strategic thinking" behind his choice. According to her, Harper - an accomplished amateur pianist - knew the song and it was within his vocal range.

"I thought it would be a fun surprise," she said.

Well, on that level, it certainly worked. Both the audience and the orchestra were taken completely by surprise and their accompanying applause, sing-a-longs and standing ovations showed they were also thrilled by his performance.

What's more, it showed a side of Harper - a human side - which is seldom on display. But back to the politics of it, his choice of that song - even if it wasn't deliberate - is dripping with irony.

At the same time that beleaguered Liberal Leader Michael Ignatieff was hosting his party's Quebec convention - and trying to pretend the recent public spat between the various party factions isn't really serious (it is, actually) - Harper was upstaging him with his performance.

But then, Harper's been doing that ever since Ignatieff decided to turn his professor's cap and gown for political office.

And, until very recently, it was Ignatieff - although not really a Harper "friend" in the usual sense of the word - who kept Harper's minority government afloat by continuing to dump on everything the Tories proposed only to turn around and vote for it.

After months and months of riding that pony - and slipping consistently in the polls - Ignatieff decided he'd had that deal and announced that Harper's time as prime minister was over. He, Michael Ignatieff, would bring down the Tories and send us into an election.

Unfortunately for Ignatieff - or perhaps fortunately, given his fading electoral prospects - Ignatieff needed the help of his "friends", NDP Leader Jack Layton and Bloc Quebecois Leader Gilles Duceppe - in order to defeat the Tories.

So while Ignatieff continues to make an ass of himself - announcing he's voting against things even

before he knows what they are - he has discovered that Layton, who talked big until faced with consequences for his actions, has decided that Harper is his "friend," and has announced he'll continue to prop up the Tories because, well, because his prospects for an election are even worse than Ignatieff's.

Your correspondent was thinking about Layton the other day when I opened my mail and, lo and behold, there was a four-page, black-and-white brochure aimed at Toronto residents, picturing both Harper and Ignatieff on the front cover - both looking horribly grim - along with the following text: "Your Liberal MP is propping up Stephen Harper. Is that what you voted for?"

Oh my.

Inside, beside a picture of the Toronto skyline, the brochure claims Harper is "pushing his conservative agenda" - imagine that, a conservative pushing a conservative agenda - and in larger type charges, "You MP is helping him do it."

It asks why Toronto's Liberal MPs "stand by as Harper denied the city even one cent in stimulus funds?" Perhaps it's because this charge is a bald-faced lie. Toronto has received many million dollars in stimulus funds. They were later than other cities, it's true. But that's because the NDP mayor - David Miller - didn't apply for anything which qualified under the program while he pushed for new streetcars (which would create lots of jobs in Thunder Bay, but not in Toronto).

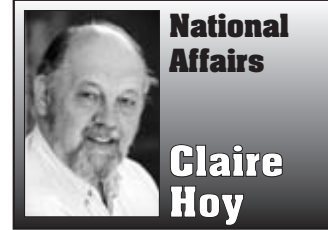
But why bother with truth when there's a country to convert to socialism, eh Jack?

Then the NDP brochure says the Liberals propped up Harper's conservative agenda "79 times and counting."

Now, of course, it is Layton who is "propping up (Harper's) conservative agenda," and not the Liberals.

Which leads to the obvious question that if Jack Layton thinks it is bad for Toronto - and presumably bad for Canada too - for the Liberals to prop up the Harper government, which is presumably why Layton kept voting against the government until the Liberals decided they would too, then why isn't it equally bad for Toronto and/or Canada for Layton to now be doing exactly the same thing? Fact is, the guy who would benefit most if an election were foisted upon us is clearly Harper. But he's not in a hurry because the longer he stays in office, the better his chances look.

All, of course, with a little help from his "friends."



National Affairs

Claire Hoy

'Legalized Greed'

Michael Moore has created food for thought in his recent movies. He has questioned many 'truths'. One might ask why after 911 Saudi Arabian aircraft took off for the far east though we were led to believe all aircraft were grounded over the U.S. (Fahrenheit 911). How can a poor country such as Cuba provide free and efficient medical treatment for all while many Americans cannot afford costly procedures in what is purported to be the world's most affluent country (Sicko)? Moore's most recent film, due out shortly, suggests weaknesses in what is considered the most advanced, democratic system in the world, capitalism (Capitalism: a Love Story, described in a Globe and Mail article).

I am not so gullible as to believe everything I'm taught is 'gospel'. It is expected however that in a 'free society' information with which we are supplied should be generally reliable. I was brought up believing gambling was not only immoral but illegal, such as the Irish Sweepstakes. Now we are bombarded with ads for competing, state-run lotteries designed to add to government coffers. We were taught that Sunday was a day of rest, illegal for stores to be open. What was once wrong is now quite legal. We looked up to church spires as the most influential structures in society.

Nowadays these are dwarfed by insurance towers and 20 story business buildings. Commerce rules the roost 7 days a week. Money is the current god.

Should we be questioning all society's sacred cows? 'What's good for General Motors is good for the country'. 'The market can do no wrong'. So why are we in

the greatest recession (depression?) in a half century? Surely the experts couldn't have all been wrong? What weren't we being told?

Canada has become an industrialized nation with its city-based population stretched along a thin line in close proximity to lucrative, urban, U.S. markets. At one time the majority of our products came from the land, the 90% of the country beyond the cities. Now prosperity depends on city-based employment. It is apparent that industry promotes cities as providing the greatest opportunity for prosperity in life. Manufacturing provides employment, hence income. Happiness is obviously to be found in the cities waiting to be discovered (as long as one has the necessary resources to survive while waiting).

But happiness is based on the necessities of life. Do the cities provide clean air, pure water, nurturing food, construction materials for warm, comfortable homes, energy to meet our diverse needs? Money, which is the drawing card, doesn't appear to be found in the country. Decision making is also vested in our cities, strongly controlled by industry. We have allowed our political leadership to bow to industrial power even though those in charge there have led us down the garden path. 'Government must bail out industry' despite the fact that the voting public has been victimized by those we've entrusted with running the show. The taxpayers are being held to ransom.

We are being asked to question some of society's most sacred cows including the basic structures of both our economy and our political system. I strongly believe in a world based on 'natu-



From the Global Classroom

Doug Skeates

ral capitalism'. Looking out the office window I can't help but think of nature's reliable largesse in providing the necessities of life while the financial system is floundering. The making of gadgets may contribute to wealth but the basics of life come from the land and particularly the sun's energy making the earth productive.

Moore is asking us to question the very bases of our material world, hence promoting a revolution in thinking. I could ask myself is it better to place my faith in those who are leaders in the financial world or in the land which has produced many generations of healthy people over thousands of years? Should our governments depend on the advice (and financial support!) from those in industry or maybe look to our basic productivity to provide a more reliable source of our citizens' prosperity?

Could we be living in a completely false world? Is it time to shift the whole basis of life? Are we asking the right questions?

Your Weekly Chuckle . . .

By KEITH HUNTER

"Today," said the professor, "I will be lecturing about the liver and the spleen."

In the gallery, one of the med students complained, "If there's one thing I can't stand it's an organ recital."

125 YEARS AGO

Thursday, October 9, 1884

A meeting at Allen's Hall in Horning's Mills has been held to consider how to check the increasing taxation being imposed on ratepayers in Melancthon's Old Survey. With some of the most heavily taxed present, the meeting was told of auditors' reports from several townships. The report of a six-man committee showed that if the Old Survey was set apart as a separate municipality, the taxation would not be so high as at present.

The annual meeting of the Toronto, Grey & Bruce Railway Company was held in the C.P.R. building, King Street West, Toronto. The secretary read the report of the past year, in which it was stated that the lease to the Ontario & Quebec Railway Company had gone into operation on the first of August last and that the company's account from that date had been merged with the O&Q. The annual rental is \$140,000, which is provided to be paid to the TG&B half-yearly and will be

applied direct to paying 4% on the \$3.5 million bond issue.

The annual fall exhibition of Melancthon Agricultural Society was held in Shelburne Tuesday and Wednesday of last week under very unfavourable conditions. A downpour Wednesday morning, accompanied by a cold, cutting wind, rendered outdoor locomotion extremely difficult and unpleasant.

100 YEARS AGO

Thursday, October 7, 1909

Dufferin Central Fair, held Tuesday and Wednesday of last week, was one of the best and most successful fairs ever held in Shelburne, with more than 4,000 in attendance.

As of October 1st, the Bell Telephone Co. is providing a night service in its Dundalk office. It will in fact be a continuous service day and night, Sundays included. An operator will be on duty at all times. Mr. Nixon, the local manager, told the Dundalk Herald that there are now between 90 and 100 phones connect-

Dipping Into the Past

Ratepayers wanted to split Melancthon into two townships

ed with Dundalk Central and the prospects are good for a further increase in number.

Joseph Paul, a C.P.R. brakeman, who lived at West Toronto, was instantly killed at McKinley Cut, three miles north of Orangeville, on Monday afternoon. The northbound freight, a heavy train with two engines, left Orangeville about 4 p.m. with a third engine helping behind to negotiate the heavy grade between the town and Orangeville Junction. Near the scene of the accident the engine wheels slipped and the train became stalled. Mr. Paul went to turn off the stop cocks on the brakes, the

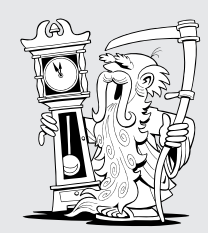
train having been divided, and the slack of the forward section drove back the cars, crushing him.

75 YEARS AGO

Wednesday, October 11, 1934

The annual Grandmothers' Day of Shelburne Women's Institute, was held at the home of Mrs. G. McGuire last Friday afternoon with the president, Mrs. Patterson, presiding. There were 57 in attendance, 12 being visitors. Two members were added to the roll, making the membership to date 80 in number.

The boxing and wrestling show held in Shelburne Curling Ring



Saturday evening, was a success in spite of bad weather. There was a good attendance and the display of fisticuffs was one of the best in years.

The first wrestling bout was between champion John Murray, of Toronto, and Ben Engblom, the Ontario Light Weight champion with Murray emerging as winner. The main wrestling bout was between Canadian champion Ted McKinley and Ontario Bantam Champion Luggie McDonough, with the decision being given in favour of McDonough. The main boxing bout of five rounds between Cecil Sharpe of Toronto and Ken Robertson of Camp Borden, ended with both finishing strongly but Sharpe getting the decision.

50 YEARS AGO

Wednesday, October 7, 1959

The 15th annual meeting of Shelburne Co-operative Association was held in the Cedar Room of Shelburne Arena on Tuesday of last week. Auditor John Aldersley said that as a result of sound management

the Co-op's financial position is secure and every department is showing increased profits.

Ten persons were injured last Thursday, one critically, when a C.P.R. Dayliner was knocked off the rails in a collision with a transport truck at the level crossing on the eastern edge of Alton. The Dayliner, bound for Owen Sound, had just passed through Alton and was reported travelling about 30 miles an hour when the westbound truck collided with it. The Dayliner careened down the track and toppled down a 10-foot embankment, coming to rest on its side.

25 YEARS AGO

Wednesday, October 10, 1984

Rex Albert Yates, 31, of Orangeville, appeared in Dufferin County Court last week on charges stemming from a July 1983 robbery at Orangeville's Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce in which two men are said to have made off with \$171,000 in cash and cheques.