

MAO-IZING AMERICAN EDUCATION

Leonard P. Liggio



Gerald Ford had been President only a few weeks when he made a major speech on American education. On August 30, 1974, suffering from jet lag, I was driving to a conference in Philadelphia when the President presented his judgments at Ohio State University. According to Ford, students are predominantly worried about how to get a job "that makes sense as well as money." Those who graduate from college find they "must acquire further credentials . . . even a Ph.D." "And you know what happens next?" he queried the students. "You go out and look for a job and now they say you are over-qualified. In one form or another, this is a Three Shell Game. Our society has been playing tricks with our greatest natural energy source. This is you. And this has got to be stopped."

What did the President propose? First, he would bring education and employers together. On what basis? Since the Lincoln administration (read: first Republican administration) "the Federal Government has been

interested in the practical application of education." Ford was setting out an educational model for colleges based on the land-grant system, by which the Federal government gave each state money to bring education and farming together. Now education and industry (especially the energy industry) would likewise be linked up. Industrially oriented universities would be encouraged by the government to work closely with "our great labor organizations."

"I propose a great new partnership of labor and educators. Why can't the Universities of America open their doors wide to working men and women, not only as students, but as teachers? Practical problem-solvers can contribute much to education, whether or not they hold degrees. The fact of the matter is that education is being strangled—by degrees."

Were we hearing straight? Was this the new President of all the people saying what I thought he was saying? In the course of a protracted youth wisely mis-spent on learning about the

world around me I had read about education in China a la the Cultural Revolution—and now I detected very familiar concepts. As the Cultural Revolution would have it, the universities were ivory-tower institutions, unproductive for society and in need of restructuring: working-class leaders would become the teachers of the students, while the scholars went forth to aid the workers in practical applications of education. Ford as an American Chen Po-ta crossed my mind, but the President has not seemed to me one who has absorbed any history.

But he was continuing. He wanted the researchers to leave the campuses to bring technical solutions to the workers—"What good is training if it is not applied to jobs?" The aim was increased productivity, a solution to inflation. Since he did not intend to stop government's printing money, real wages could only outstrip inflation via increased productivity. I am not sure what brand of economics that comes under, but to expect to stop

inflation without stopping the printing presses, to expect to stop it through utopian productivity increases, seems like the economics of the Mad Hatter.

Ford proposed new vocational approaches to education to create new jobs and new skills. "Your government will help you create a vocational environment responsive to our needs, but the government cannot achieve personal fulfillment for each of you. You, in this case, are the essential ingredient. Your determination, your dedication, your will will make the significant difference." Like *Peking Review's* model of the dedicated young Chinese who created China's new petroleum industry, Ford declared that American youth, with the Vietnam war over and the draft repealed, have a duty to enlist in his national campaign for increased productivity. Dedication to the nation-state's goals!

Then the President asked us to look beyond this worker-campus-Washington alliance. And where should we set our sights? On China! "With four times the population of the United States, a nation growing at the rate of two New York Cities every 12 months, that vast nation is making very significant technological progress. From a personal observation as well as by records, you can see the Chinese productivity is gaining momentum, and the majority of the Chinese on the mainland today are young people, highly motivated, extremely well disciplined." Thus did Ford celebrate the Chinese example as a challenge for American youth. The young are the "greatest untapped source of energy. But energy unused is energy wasted." So "productivity, yours as well as mine, must improve if we are to have less of an inflationary economy." How? "We need the will, the dedication, the discipline to take action." Discipline, eh!

"At home, the government must help people in doing things they cannot achieve as individuals. Accordingly, I have asked the Secretaries of Commerce, Labor and HEW to report to me new ways to bring the world of work and the institutions of education closer together. For your government as well as you, the time has come for a fusion of the realities of the work-a-day life with the teaching of academic institutions

"I am directing the responsible agencies of the Federal government to make a new evaluation of where we are, where we want to go, and where we can reasonably expect to be five years from now

"There are, for example, approximately 380 separate Federal educational programs beyond the high school level, some duplicating others, administered by some 50 separate executive agencies. The result inevitably is a bureaucracy that often provides garbled guidelines instead of taut lifelines to good and available jobs."

Thank heaven for Parkinson's Law. Think what we have been spared by having 380 separate Federal programs and what discipline will befall us without the 50 separate executive agencies. George III wanted to eliminate the

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inefficient units between which the Americans free-traded and tax-avoided, through which they forgot deference and were not disciplined—perfect Redskins. Oh, Huck Finn, where are you when we need you most? What would Mark Twain, H. L. Mencken, Albert Jay Nock, Frank Chodorov, and Harry Elmer Barnes have said about all this? And which magazine or Op-Ed page would today publish them in the home of the free and the land of the brave?

But our philosopher-king of Golden Sicily, supported by the 380 Platonic Academies on the Potomac, said more. "Show us how to increase productivity. Show us how to combine new lifestyles with old responsibilities. Show us how universities can work with industry and labor unions to devise a whole new community of

learning across this great land. Show us how work-study programs can become a part of the ongoing educational process. Show us how new skills can improve technology while humanizing its use." Oh Brave New World! Yet these are not the mere musings of a transient occupant of the curial chair; chief magistrates come and go, but there are enduring institutions.

One such is the Carnegie Endowment, which has funded a massive study of higher education in America as a guideline to Federal and state policymakers. Ford's speech is the tip of the iceberg of that study, into which the American university ship is sailing unawares. The last quotation above especially reminds me of the analysis made by Clark Kerr, then head of the University of California, now head of that Carnegie study, in his *Multiversity*. (I wrote what I considered a rather incisive interpretation of that analysis a decade ago for a major libertarian review, which typically suffered a demise on the verge of publishing that article.)

I suggest reading Kerr's book, the Carnegie study, or *Peking Review*. Beyond that, I only can recall Huck Finn's description of his feelings when Aunt Polly began talking about educating him. Darn it all, Huck, you didn't explain how to build a raft; and Uncle Sam is breathing down our necks—"Your government will help you create" Why are Ford, Kerr, et al so determined to destroy liberal arts education? There might be something basically liberating there. As one of the best living educators—who was consequently driven out of higher education for two decades—said, all young people need is a coffee shop, where less-young people who think they know something can talk to whichever students want to listen, and a library, where the young people can go to read about what interested them in the conversations. That seems a better marketplace of ideas than the competition of two nationally disciplined youth generations proposed by Ford. ☐

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DISCORD IN UTOPIA

George S. Swan

Many errors and many disagreements are possible in the field of implementation, but what is essential here is the principle to be implemented; the principle that the purpose of law and of government is the protection of individual rights.—Ayn Rand

In his wide-ranging *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, philosopher Robert Nozick argues the libertarian case, in the process addressing several objections to the minimal state. One of these is the argument that since economic inequalities are often accompanied by political inequalities, the deliberate enhancement of economic equality is defensible to avert or reduce lopsided political power.

Yet Nozick intelligently counters: "The minimal state best reduces the chances of such takeover or manipulation of the state by persons desiring power or economic benefits, especially if combined with a reasonably alert citizenry, since it is the minimally desirable target for such takeover and

manipulation. Nothing much is to be gained by doing so; and the cost to citizens if it occurs is minimized." But both the objection and the response are compressed into a single paragraph by Nozick. (Similarly, discussions of economic inequality in Ludwig von Mises' *Human Action* and in Milton Friedman's *Capitalism and Freedom* ignore this anti-minimal-state argument.)

The following discussion demonstrates that political discord arising from special economic interests will, at least on narrow issues, accompany even the libertarian state. Significant policy differences already proliferate among free-society proponents, indicating the outlines of potential politico-economic wars of a future libertarian utopia. Wouldn't it be valuable, then for libertarian thinkers, in response to the challenges to libertarianism on grounds of inequalities of wealth and power, to mobilize a more comprehensive answer than simple capsules of common sense?

Specific policy differences within the free-society fold are abundant. Novelist Ayn Rand, for example, sees

a legitimate role for patent and copyright alike. "Patents and copyrights are the legal implementation of the base of all property rights: a man's right to the product of his mind." But economist Murray Rothbard asserts that "bracketing of patents and copyrights is wholly fallacious: the two are completely different in relation to the free market."

Rand contends that the most rational copyright solution is Great Britain's 1911 Copyright Act, establishing the copyright of books, motion pictures, and paintings for the author's lifetime and 50 years thereafter. But Rothbard, who endorses a contractual system of copyright, believes a creator's copyright should be perpetual. In Rand's assessment of patent, "The legal problem is to set a time limit which would secure for the inventor the fullest possible benefit of his invention without infringing the right of others to pursue independent research." Again Rothbard comes down differently. "Patents prevent a man from using his invention even though all the property is his and he has not stolen the invention, either ex-