

PUBLIC EDUCATION

Identifying the Problem

STATE MONOPOLY

When it comes to the books we read, the neighbourhood we live in, the religion or philosophy we practise, the food we eat, the people we associate with, in fact, in *most* areas of our lives, we highly value our freedom of choice. Yet, when it comes to one of our most precious resources --- our children --- parents are not permitted to exercise this necessary freedom.

State interference with and control of *education* is greater than it is in almost any other area of personal choice. If the government had interfered in the clothing business to the same extent, then we'd all be wearing uniforms sporting a maple leaf and a picture of Big Beaver; if in the energy business, a Petrocan station on every corner; if in the electronic media, C.B.C. on every wavelength.

The closest thing to the state education system in size and scope is the post office (Canada Post). Like the post office, state schools constitute a monopoly. Competition is small because it suffers a severe (state-imposed) economic disadvantage. And like the post office, this lack of competition has allowed it to become mired in labour strife, morale problems, and inefficiency. Like the post office, it is often found to be impossible to correct such problems even when they have been identified and recognized for decades.

Common complaints about state schools argue:

- that their political masters, the school trustees, seldom set foot in the schools to see first hand what is going on and seldom approach students or their families for their opinions. Nor would it make much difference if they did, because their trusteeship carries little real power. The schools are governed by hundreds of clauses in provincial law, which stifle innovation at every turn, while course content is dictated by a huge Queen's Park bureaucracy,

- that the curricula are more the result of political pressure than of market feedback resulting from consumer preferences,

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- that school funding is becoming a battleground for the religious sects, each claiming "equal benefits of the law", meaning equal access to tax money for schools, place ethics and attitudes,

- that heavy unionization of the teaching profession has fostered a system which rewards seniority more than ability, and has made it almost impossible to turn over staff fast and often enough to renew the schools with fresh minds and fresh ideas,

- that school costs and school taxes are rising faster than enrolment, and continue to rise even in the face of declining enrolment,

- that too much (or too little) emphasis is placed on a piece of paper called a "diploma", implying that the paper is not worth what it ought to be worth,

- that high school graduates lack basic skills such as literacy, numerical ability, and acceptable workplace ethics and attitudes.

- that students have lack of respect for schools and for their own education, since neither they nor their families must directly pay for the costs of that education,

- that compulsory schooling nourishes a coercive mind which, in later years, may result in coercive behaviour,

- that the student political leaders of today will be the leaders of special interest groups begging for government handouts tomorrow,

- that state schools serve only the median level of intelligence; slow learners get left behind and fast learners get fed up with boredom.

Freedom Party believes that the purpose of government is to *protect* our freedom of choice, *not* to restrict it.

The choice of an education may be the most important choice a person can make in his or her lifetime. Yet how many state schools even bother to advertise their points of difference from other schools? When was the last time a state educator called you on the phone to talk about your family's educational needs? How many choices do you have? Do you have any worth pursuing? If you don't know, why not? Why is more time and attention given to the purchase of a new car than to the choice of an education?

Because --- when it comes to education --- we haven't got a choice.

Since the purpose of an education is to help us make choices, isn't it about time that the system lived up to its intended purpose? We think so.

After all, freedom of choice is what we're all about!