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SUCCESS THROUGH FAILURE:

A Tentative Analysis of the Ideological Roles of the Educational System

I n t r o d u c t i o n

Recent studies of educational institutions have extensively documented the widespread failure of such institutions in fulfilling their formally established function, namely the transmission of knowledge. This failure is generally accompanied by a deep seated reluctance on the part of teachers and administrators to act in manners best calculated to avoid it. This paper attempt to provide an interpretation of this situation, by stressing the social and ideological role of educational institutions and their failures.

Using Greek education as a case study, the paper begins by an examination of the facts and the opinions concerning the failures at the primary and secondary education levels. It then moves to a consideration of failure at the university level. The major part of the paper offers a tentative working hypothesis which attempts to perceive the patterns of educational failure in the perspective of the functions of education in contemporary society and of the changing role of science in it.

THE FAILURE OF COMPULSORY EDUCATION

It is generally accepted that the effectiveness of the Greek educational system is very low and that there is a high proportion of student failure at all levels.

In primary and secondary education, the percentage of failure is indeed quite high. According to the figures of the Greek Statistical Service (ESYE), the percentage of failure in the six years of primary education ranges from 15% in the first grade to 25% in the sixth. This, despite the efforts, since the 1960s, of governmental educational authorities, which, through circulars requiring «less strict demands» on the students, especially of the schools in agricultural areas, have promoted a policy

leading to an artificial decrease in the national percentages for «semi-literate» persons, in the 6 to 14 age group.

In secondary education, the percentage of failure, leading to abandonment of schooling, was very high until 1979¹. Over 50% of registered pupils had left school two to three years before the formal end of studies. No definite statistical data are available for the years since the educational reforms. However, a research project currently in process² provides some first indications as to the failure percentages during this period. According to these findings: a) The dropout rate at the start of the first three years of secondary education (which are now compulsory and form the «Gymnasium») is 10%, i.e., 10% of primary school leavers do not attend the (compulsory) first year of the Gymnasium. b) The dropout rate, because of academic failure, in the course of the Gymnasium is, according to data not yet fully processed, between 20 and 30%.

Perceived Causes of the «Natural» Failure

Perhaps more revealing than failure percentages is the opinion of teachers at both the primary and the secondary level. The preliminary findings of the above mentioned research project provide some useful indications: such teachers were asked the following open-ended question: «What do you think are the principal causes of student dropout from the first year of the compulsory Gymnasium?» 38% said that such failure is due to the limited aptitude of pupils because of the low educational level of their families and their agricultural environment, which deprives them of learning incentives and of information. For over 55% of the teachers student failure is attributable to the incompetence of the students; (some typical responses were: «they are the inept ones»; «they have low mental ability»; «they don't have the mental qualities that school requires», etc.).

It is equally suggestive that teachers have been intensely distur-

1. Until 1975, compulsory education was limited to the six years of primary school. Access to secondary school, which also lasted six years, was regulated by entrance examinations. The reform measures legislated in 1976-1977, whose effective application started in 1979, increased the years of compulsory studying to nine, thus covering the first three years of secondary education, and eliminated entrance examinations.

2. Research project on the constraints to the extension of compulsory nine-year schooling. The project, covering the entire school population of the district of Joannina (Epirus), was initiated in 1981 and is expected to be completed by the end of 1983. (Research team coordinator, A. Frangoudaki).

bed by the recent educational reform measures eliminating grading and establishing the automatic promotion of pupils (i.e., no repeating of the same school year) in the six years of primary school. An enormous percentage of 86% is of the opinion that these measures will bring to the Gymnasium pupils who will not know how to read and write.

It is thus evident that all teachers, even those who point to social causes for the failure of pupils, attribute responsibility for the failure solely to the student and his family environment. Among several hundreds of responses, not a single one attributed even part of the failure to the school itself, its teaching methods, its curriculum, etc.

Moreover, there is a widespread conviction among Gymnasium teachers (over 80% of responses) that student quality is much lower than it was in preceding decades. This conviction does not vary with the teachers' age: younger teachers judge on the basis of student quality at the time they were Gymnasium students.

This last point is of particular importance, because this «constant» lowering of student levels, along with acceptance of failure as a natural result of the students' diminished mental abilities, is in obvious contradiction with the forceful resistance of the educational system to new pedagogical methods, novel teaching techniques and to the entire approach which, since 1920, looks into the system itself for the causes of student failure¹.

There is by now in Greece a widely accepted interpretation of the phenomenon of student failure and of the low level of graduates. This interpretation, directly and indirectly expressed, in an extensive literature, is valid up to a certain point. It cogently notes the inadequacies of the educational system, the lack of serious government concern, the low percentage of GNP devoted to education², the unmet needs in buildings and personnel, and the refusal to inaugurate radical reforms and to introduce new methods. Although valid as far as it goes, this interpretation is inadequate to account for all facets of the phenomenon. An examination of student performance at the university level will lead us to the further conclusion that this interpretation is misleading, because it stresses secondary causes and disregards the most important ones.

1. Greek primary school is the most traditional in Western Europe. In all educational activity as well as in the formation of teachers, it ignores impressively modern psychological and pedagogical learning.

2. Compare for instance the public expenditure on education in Greece in 1978 (2.4%) with that of Belgium (6.9%), Bulgaria (5.6%), Ireland (6.3%), Portugal (3.7%). See Unesco, *Statistical Digest-1981*, Paris 1981.

THE DIFFERING PATTERNS OF FAILURE AT THE UNIVERSITY LEVEL

Failure at the university level varies widely in quantity and quality depending on the kind of higher education institution involved. «High-quality» schools, that is to say those whose diploma has high economic and symbolic value, have a high rate of failure at the point of entry (by means of entrance examinations and a numerus clausus) and a negligible one during the course of studies. «Low-quality» schools¹ have a much higher rate of attrition and failure, and a much older student body.

This differentiation between schools is evident and thus generally admitted. The prevailing interpretation, however, especially among university teachers, attributes it wholly to the differences in student quality among schools, as manifested by the restricted restrictive entrance examinations, close supervision and consequent high student performance in high-quality schools. What this interpretation disregards is that these schools also recruit their students mainly from the upper social strata, a phenomenon which is made particularly visible by the fact that the Greek student population as a whole has a much higher percentage of students from the lower classes than the western European average².

Greek universities are marked by two important features: a) There is a general complaint, especially by university professors, that student level is constantly falling; and b) university language, as an instrument for transmission of scientific learning, is remarkably opaque.

There is no systematic study of the opinion of the various groups within the university on the level of students and studies. It is however common, almost a tradition, expressed in the official minutes of faculty meetings and especially in the enormous general literature on university affairs, particularly at the time of the annual entrance examinations, to find continually and without exception that the student level is «lower». Professors assert that the student level is much below their minimal requirements; that they have to adapt their grading to the mediocrity of

1. On this differentiation between high and low quality university institutions, see A. Frangoudaki, «The impasse of educational reform: an introduction», *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora*, 1-2, Spring-Summer 1981, p. 12.

2. On the debate on whether Greek universities are more «democratic» than Western European ones, see the article of the above footnote, p. 10-13.

the majority of students; that their students, beyond a negligible minority, do not meet the most minimal demands for learning skills¹.

It is true that there has been a sizable increase in university student numbers since 1960, leading to the presence in the universities of a higher percentage of students of peasant social origin. This fact can no doubt account in part for the finding in question. Yet, assertions concerning the «Lowered levels» of student ability and performance, which are by no means new, anyway go far beyond what can be explained by such data. They are indeed self-contradictory. For these assertions to be valid, student level must have been falling without respite for at least the last twenty years. This is in itself highly improbable and runs counter to the facts of economic and technical development of the country, which have visibly improved on the past quarter century. Even the educational system, despite its poor condition, is considerably better than it was at the start of that period.

To grasp the meaning of this situation one must perceive the co-existence of contradictory tendencies within university faculties. The professors' constant complaint regarding the worsening levels of student performance goes together with their indirect but forceful persistence in using teaching methods and approaches which show no concern for improving student performance. Professors act as if they took it as given that students should have come to the universities already in possession of much better learning skills and they merely find that students do not. Moreover, following a long tradition of *ex cathedra* teaching, university professors, in their large majority, resist all attempts at introducing other teaching methods. They relegate low level teaching personnel, usually still lacking the doctorate, to classes utilizing more active methods of student-teacher interaction (such as the «travaux pratiques», etc.), which they consider beneath their dignity, precisely because such classes and methods are too school-like. Thus, while attacking-sometimes very violently-the constantly lowering level of student performance, university professors refuse as a rule to change their teaching in the manners best designed to help raise it.

The second feature of the university situation mentioned above, the opacity of the university language, makes manifest the same contradictory, although not necessarily conscious, attitude and communicates the same message.

1. See for instance, the newspapers and magazines for the period 1978-1981 covering the general debate in all Greek universities concerning the new law on higher education and examination problems.

This feature may best be approached through the study of an interesting, indeed revealing recent phenomenon¹. In the last three decades, roughly since the end of the civil war (1949), a popular approach to the interpretation of social phenomena in Greece has been to refer to the promotion by social institutions of definite politically reactionary aims. The opacity of university language and of the language of political power in general (which until 1974 was a purist form of written language, *Katharevousa*) was thus construed as an intentional effort to promote and defend the social and ideological interests of the ruling classes. Since 1974, largely because of the overwhelming condemnation of the military dictatorship (1967-1974) by all political and social groups, even the conservative ones, Greece has entered a period of bourgeois liberalism. In the universities this has led to substantial changes, one of which is the presence among the teachers of left wing, marxist and radical intellectuals (something that was inconceivable twenty years ago).

In the context now of our particular subject here, we note that the scholarly, university language of these social scientists belonging to the left is as opaque as the much-criticized traditional university language of conservatives. It is an artificial language, intensely inflationary, full of rare or unknown words and terms, using peculiar forms of syntax. It indulges in a multitude of implicit references, elliptical formulations and newly translated terms from foreign languages, differently translated by each writer. An abuse of direct and indirect references to foreign authorities, not only in the discipline at issue in each case but also in related disciplines, is manifested in part by a cult of footnotes and an exasperated use of abbreviations and symbols. In short, it is a precious and contrived language, difficult and unclear, a language which frightens the reader. Because it is inaccessible. It is a secret language which refuses to give to the reader (or listener) the necessary keys for its deciphering, and indeed discourages him in any search for the informational message it may contain.

The use of this language not only by the traditional conservative but also by the contemporary marxist and radical intellectuals is highly significant, especially in a country where for a long time, because of historical and political reasons, the use of an inaccessible language (i.e., *katharevousa*) has been identified with elitist and authoritarian attitudes. It is ironic that during all that period the marxist glossary played

1. See A. Frangoudaki, «The reactionary language of progressive intellectuals», in the *Festschrift* in memory of F. Apostolopoulos (in press).

the role of a revelatory language, bringing out in the open the interests hiding behind the verbiage of intellectual and political authority.

If the effectiveness of language is measured by the amount of information it communicates, the language of university teachers, including left wing ones, cannot be said to be effective. Here too, university teachers seem to assume that the artificial language they are using should be automatically understood by their students. This despite their realizing from every day experience the imperfect understanding and the even more imperfect utilization of that language by the students.

The belief in natural endowments

From the summary survey of recent Greek experience we may keep the following in mind: a) Primary and secondary education teachers, in their great majority, consider that student failure in school is a natural consequence of the cognitive inadequacy of those who fail; b) They perceive reform measures abolishing grading, etc., as giving the incompetent access to the Gymnasium; c) They hold that student levels are lower than in the past. Moreover, d) university teachers, for their part, while constantly asserting that student levels are becoming lower, systematically refuse to act in a rationally effective manner to improve that situation.

The Greek experience in this domain, despite its peculiarities, does not radically differ from that of other countries, especially industrially advanced ones. The low levels of students and school diplomas cannot be attributed primarily to social conditions and to the country's limited economic development. The educational institutions, through the selection of competent and incompetent students in the early years of schooling and through the elitist behaviour of university authorities, cultivate and reproduces the deeply rooted belief in innate intelligence, diligently searching for signs of natural superiority in their students, on which will depend their expulsion from or their acceptance in the temple of learning.

We may thus state the following hypothesis: the educational system does not fulfill what is the theoretically its sole aim, the transmission of knowledge, not because of incidental faults and weaknesses, but in accordance with its predominant logic. The question follows whether in so «failing», the educational system fulfills other aims within a given society.

TOWARDS A THEORETICAL WORKING HYPOTHESIS

If by knowledge we mean scientific knowledge, and if we define scientific knowledge as the point in the understanding and control over the natural and social environment reached by a particular society at a specific moment, then the transmission of knowledge involves the creation of an increasing capability for understanding and controlling the natural and social environment. It is obvious that, judged on the basis of such criteria, the educational system does not transmit knowledge.

While scientific knowledge in today's concrete society involves going beyond Rousseau's interpretation of equality and social hierarchy, sociological research having established that natural inequalities are fundamentally social ones, the educational system reproduces impressively the ideology of natural differences. That is to say, the knowledge transmitted by the educational system ignores scientific findings.

There is a fundamental paradox in the position of today's educational institutions: to begin with, they faie in the fulfillment their sole explicit aim, which legitimizes their existence, namely the transmission of knowledge. Yet, we find that at all its levels (although most obviously at the lower levels) the educational system limits itself to sorting the members of the younger generations, determining in a multitude of ways those who are incapable of learning. The transmission of knowledge becomes allocation of incompetences, justified by resorting to the theory of natural inequality. This allocation of incompetences is not missing even at the highest level of the system, presumably directed at those who are already found to be naturally endowed. At that level indeed the complicity of teachers and taught in the great misunderstanding acted out in the ritual of university teaching becomes obvious: while the avowed aim of the ritual is the transmission of knowledge, the entire relationship between the teacher-holder of knowledge and the the:student, the apprentice magician, seems constructed in the manner best calculated to obstruct the communication of information messages.

A caveat is in order at this point. One of the causes for the failure of the educational process lies in the inadequacies of institutions and teachers. Yet, the phenomenon should not be attributed solely or primarily to such inadequacies. The university teacher's conduct, his use of a secret language and his rejection of more effective methods, may be useful for hiding his incompetence or insecurity. Nonetheless, there is no causal connection there. We find the same conduct even in the presence of high scholarly quality and competence. One might indeed argue

that high quality more often promote such conduct. It is not the low level of scholarly achievement that creates the contrast between the aims and the outcome in educational institutions.

A second caveat points in a different direction. Modern marxist theory has led to the conclusion that the educational system in advanced capitalist society plays a determining role in the reproduction of the dominant ideology. The trouble is that this fruitful conclusion often functions in Greek society as a self-evident truth, a commonplace that impedes the analysis and understanding of reality. One may even read, in an official governmental text, the disarmingly naïve if not intentionally misleading formulation that an educational system is needed «which will not reproduce the dominant ideology».

The question remains. If teaching is a ritual which decreases to a minimum the effectiveness of communication, as if communication of knowledge were not its aim, what is in fact its aim?

We know that the educational system transmits not only certain technical knowledge, from reading and writing to theoretical physics and commercial law, but also a certain ideology, that is to say the principles for the acceptance of the social division of labour. It is indeed arguable that acceptance of the social division of labour is the primary function of the educational system and not a second or even a co-equal one. The lack of effectiveness of the educational system, in terms of its formally avowed function, may thus point to its more basic function, may make manifest another, unavowed role of educational institutions, fundamentally a role of social conservation.

This role has taken new forms in our times, and it is to these new forms that we shall now turn. The work of several contemporary thinkers, sociologists, political scientists and educational experts may help us to find the direction of these changes.

In the United States, the so called conflict theories in sociology and the work of Pierre Bourdieu and his collaborators in Europe lead to parallel conclusions that the educational system, through its apparent meritocratic processes of selection, legitimizes social, racial and gender inequalities. Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, on the other hand, see the effectiveness of the educational system not so much in the conscious intentions of teachers and government authorities, as in the close relationship between social authority and control relations in the labor market and in school¹.

1. S. Bowles, H. Gintis, *Schooling in capitalist America*, Basic Books, New York 1976, especially the chapters 1 and 9.

Twenty five years ago Herbert Marcuse found that we live in a period where the exercise of power, class domination, has taken new forms. Power has become much more «rational» and knowledge has a great part in the exercise of power. The dangers to the existence and the perpetuation of the social system, which had their origin in the generally known and scientifically documented struggle between social classes, gave birth to state intervention. The state aiming now at the stability and growth of the economy, gives a different role to politics¹. To the same effect, Jürgen Habermas has shown that state power through the reallocation of resources in favour of the lower classes changes the level of social conflict which no longer has the form of class conflict. In the process, the production of knowledge and economic development become intimately related, as highly developed technology is the moving force of production and such technology is directly related to science and the production of knowledge². The continuing growth of productive forces depends on scientific and technological progress. Finally, state intervention transforms political action into a constant effort to remove the disfunctions which could endanger the social system. And this is done to a great extent by experts, the specialists, the institutionally established possessors of knowledge.

At its upper ranks the educational system, *instance de production des producteurs*, as Bourdieu put it, is with respect to its result contrary to technocratic logic. Its basic social role is that it «exercises a strictly magic effectiveness of consecration», as the most effective education does not do anything else «that teach the fish how to swim»³.

Elsewhere Bourdieu has referred to no less than «racism of intelligence». One of the most subtle, the most unrecognizable forms of racism, therefore one of the most rarely denounced. And he goes on to refer to it as «class racism». The members of the upper strata of the ruling class «feel justified to exist as dominant - they consider themselves of a superior essence». And in this line of thinking he holds that school degrees, as guarantees of the intelligence, «have taken the place of ancient titles (nobility or property) as far as access itself to the positions of economic

1. H. Marcuse, «Trieblehre und Freiheit», in Freund in der Gegenwart, *Frankfurter Beiträge zur Soziologie*, vol. VI, Frankfurt 1957.

2. J. Habermas, *La technique et la science comme idéologie* Denoël Gonthier, Paris 1973 (1st German edition: Frankfurt 1968).

3. P. Bourdieu, «Epreuve scolaire et consécration sociale: les classes préparatoires aux grandes écoles», *Actes de la recherche en Sciences Sociales*, 39, September 1981, p. 3.

power is concerned¹.

It is important to attempt to elucidate further the particular forms that the ideology of the educational system takes in our days. We have noted that at the university level the professor sacrifices the effectiveness of his teaching, essentially the transmission of knowledge, because he participates in a ritual which indirectly transmits the message that Science is inaccessible to mediocre minds. Scientists and intellectuals see themselves as a social group which owes its social status not to birth or money or power but to intelligence. They perceive this not nearly as legitimizing their social status but as implying that they, as servants of Science and Knowledge, constitute the only persons who are genuinely neutral in terms of social conflict.

This belief in a Science which is above social conflict is a return to long refuted approaches to the understanding of society. It is impossible to contest today that knowledge and science are social phenomena, determined by the historical conditions prevalent in the particular society at a particular moment. To hold scientific knowledge and expertise above history and society is to destroy the very basis of scientific understanding of social phenomena.

The very belief in the neutrality of science plays a definite role in the social and political relations of our time. It legitimizes the use of scientific conclusions in social practice to an extent that would not be feasible if their historically determined character were acknowledged. The superior, independent and objective specialist is not himself involved in the social uses of his findings; at most he may discover belatedly their political use and be led to a crisis of conscience. Like a modern knight, he faces, alone and unprejudiced, the great questions of matter and ideas. In this manner, he is the necessary accomplice in excluding citizens from a role in decisions affecting their life and vital interests. The notion of social usefulness of knowledge disappears and the citizen increasingly cedes his right to decide to those who know and therefore are able to decide in his place.

In these matters, the institutionalized and officially consecrated knowledge produced and reproduced by the educational system plays an essential role. The state intervention, which transforms political praxis into an effort to evade or defer disfunctions which might place the system in danger, is largely executed by specialists. Political power is exe-

1. P. Bourdieu, *Questions de Sociologie*, Les éditions de Minuit, Paris 1980, p. 264-265.

reised in the name of the expert, the one who knows, thus bringing about a dual outcome: power and its exercise are legitimated - is there anything fairer than for power to be in the hands of those who know? At the same time it makes a critical intervention by the citizens impossible, for they recognize themselves as non-experts. Political power thus loses some of the features of bourgeois elected authority and, in the name of science, acquires charismatic traits.

It looks as if by means of the cult of science and of the loss of the notion of social usefulness of knowledge we are imperceptibly going back to an ideology of nature, such as that contested by John Locke and J.J. Rousseau. Through acceptance of the neutrality of science and of an elitist ideology, through the reign of experts possessing innate intelligence, we seem to be moving backwards, long before Diderot stated in the article on Authority of the *Encyclopédie*: «Aucun homme n'a reçu de la nature le droit de commander aux autres».

Science itself is used in our times to reproduce ideology¹. We are referring here neither to the direct political exploitation of science, manifested in the notorious Project Camelot affair, nor to the conscious ideological efforts to defend definite political theories and social attitudes, mainly by social scientists, as in the case of Arthur Jensen's conclusion². What we are talking about is the indirect transformation of scientific knowledge into ideology, in such a manner as to undermine already established learning concerning social reality. Knowledge becomes a value in itself, totally independent from any usefulness for the social groups. Through its impressive achievements, it assumes the form of the progress of mankind. In today's nuclear laboratories and space research centers an old ideology revives, an idealistic conception of Human Nature, of the universal and atemporal notion of Man. Thus, science cultivates and strengthens the prescientific way of thinking, which attribute to man characteristics that are not historical, not social, but eternal - and this not

1. The term ideology is used here in the sense prevalent since Feuerbach and Marx, as a way of thought calculated, deliberately or not, to hide the exercise of power, along with the nuance added by Max Weber and which involves legitimizing the exercise of power.

2. On this topic, see Philip Green, *The pursuit of inequality*, Pantheon Books, New York 1981. This is, in my view, the best analysis of the social causation of the coming in to being and dissemination of the racist conclusion of the jensenian approach. Also, Green makes a particularly timely and interesting prophecy: According to him the revindication of the equality of the sexes, in the forms it has taken in American society, will bring about similar attempts at a «scientific» demonstration of the natural inferiority of women.

through the haze of prescientific perception, but through the magnification of electronic microscopes.

The very conception of society inherent in the idealistic conception of Man involves a return to a vision of society, out dated since Emile Durkheim, according to which society is an aggregation of individuals. The existence and role of social classes is generally accepted today; through state intervention, however, and through reallocation of social resources with a view to the transposition of social conflict from the class level to other levels, as well as through the ideology of the progress of Mankind, the conflictual coexistence of social classes is indirectly promoted in a neoparetian logic of the natural presence of rulers and ruled, leaders and masses in every society.

The combination of the charismatic character of the expert intellectual of our time and the ideology of the progress of mankind gives to the intellectuals as social group additional force in their role, according to Antonio Gramsci, of «mediators» between the hegemonic strata of the ruling class and the dominated classes, with a view to the latter's consent. The role of the educational system is once again essential: Beyond the reproduction of the social division of labour, educational institutions especially at the highest levels of their pyramid, play a role of social conservation, through the caste neutrality cultivated in the social stratum of «superior» and «independent» individuals, the intellectuals, as well as through the absolute value and ahistorical objectivity attributed to science.

The phenomenon of the use of science for the reproduction of ideology with a view to the exercise of political power is not one that is limited to a few only industrial societies. On the basis of what has been argued here, political power in contemporary capitalist society has assumed new forms, has been «rationalized», using experts for its exercise and to neutralize the critical intervention of citizens. The fundamental outcome of these processes is the perpetuation and reproduction of the specific social structures. Such perpetuation is implicitly based on a myth cultivated by all these new forms of power, the myth of the end of radical social changes in history. The list of possible societies has been exhausted, our technological society is the last stage of human social evolution.

This message however does not come solely from the scientific and ideological power centers of capitalism. The message is also transmitted and indeed strengthened from the socialist countries and the majority of the communist forces in the west. The idea that societies can no lon-

ger be radically transformed, an idea of enormous political significance, is reinforced by the manner in which authorities in socialist countries deal with social conflicts within their own societies: they approach them as if they were natural accidental phenomena which disturb the social equilibrium and impede the inevitable linear march of society towards progress. To the critiques concerning the existence of social conflicts, inequalities and oppression in existing socialist societies, the response is that every objection is futile, if not suspect, because there is no choice, since we can only choose among models of existing societies. Is not this essentially the same message, that the list of historical societies is exhausted? But if the list is exhausted, then history has stopped. This conclusion seems once more like an ideology promoted with the instruments of science; the end of history is declared in the name of historical science, not to say in the name of its founder.

INSTEAD OF A CONCLUSION

The educational system has a dual function: the transmission of knowledge and that of ideology. The ideological function involving the reproduction of the social division of labour and the perpetuation of the social equilibrium, has always had first priority.

Today, education and science play a role which is more important than ever for the conservation of social structures. It has been argued in this paper that the phenomena which at first glance appear as inadequacies and failures of the educational system, can be best understood when seen in this context. It becomes then evident that the failures of educational institutions have significant social and ideological uses. They involve construction of a model of the exceptional person who possesses natural superiority in the guise of innate intelligence and thus allow the exercise of political power in the name of such charismatic individuals, displacing the possible political intervention of inexperienced citizens.

An implicit conclusion from this line of argument is that social conflict takes place today more than ever in the realm of ideas. Knowledge has today greater effective power than it had in the 19th century.