

**AN ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION OF IVAN ILLICH'S  
SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY IN THE LIGHT OF HIS  
EARLY DEVELOPMENT AND THE MAJOR CRITIQUES OF HIS THEORIES**

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to try to bring some clarity and perspective into the controversy generated by Ivan Illich's theory of the necessity for a deschooled society. Furthermore it attempts to elaborate on how Illich's concepts originated and evolved. In this respect, it strives to present all of the elements which have had an impact upon Illich's intellectual formation and his subsequent religious, social, and educational philosophy.

The method of inquiry for my thesis is to investigate the various experiences, including definite influences, which contributed to shaping Illich's attitudes towards society, technology, and formal education. Since all of these factors eventually contributed to his famous theory of deschooling, this paper attempts to describe how Illich developed intellectually from his younger days until he conceptualized his notion of a free education in the Centre International de Documentation. In addition, this study analyzes the reactions of the major critics and commentators who either criticized or supported Illich's theories.

The thesis concludes by presenting the reactions of the author to both Ivan Illich's theories and to the views of his major critics and commentators.

## RESUME

Le but de ma thèse est d'essayer d'éclaircir la dispute engendrée par la théorie de Ivan Illich promouvant une société sans école. Dans cet ouvrage je tente d'expliquer comment les opinions de Ivan Illich sont nées et de quelle façon elles ont évoluées.

A ce sujet, mon oeuvre s'efforce de tenir compte de tous les éléments qui ont pu influencer la formation religieuse et sociale de Ivan Illich ainsi que ses idées sur l'éducation. Ma méthode de travail consiste dans l'étude des faits et des facteurs qui ont contribué à la formation de Illich depuis sa tendre jeunesse jusqu'au moment dans sa vie quand il a concrétisé sa théorie sur l'éducation libre dans son école Le Centre International de Documentation. En continuant, ce papier fait l'analyse des critiques les plus importantes qui ont été faites pour et contre les dites théories.

Cette thèse termine en soumettant les idées de l'auteur sur Ivan Illich et ses théories, ainsi que son opinion sur les différentes critiques émises à ce sujet.

## PREFACE

The objective of this thesis is to try to shed some light upon the deschooling controversy. In other words to try to discover what Illich is saying as well as what his major critics are saying about his theories. By analyzing Illich's intellectual development I will try to unravel the factors which led Illich to his idea of deschooling and how this concept developed over the years in his mind.

In the first chapter I will present Illich as a person, who has been subject to a variety of influences, in order to be able to describe in the following chapters how his personality and convictions evolved until he proposed the eradication of the school system.

In the second chapter, I will describe how Illich inter-reacted with his early intellectual environment and how different occurrences and ideas shaped his philosophy of life.

In the third chapter I will present, as a starting point for his theories, the final product of Illich's intellectual evolution, namely his beliefs in religion and education, as well as his social philosophy.

In the fourth chapter I will present some of Illich's most representative critics. By this presentation I intend to put into perspective the whole controversy over Illich's theories.

In the fifth chapter I will offer my own commentary on Illich and his critics by presenting my own reaction to their commentaries and critiques.

In the sixth chapter I will try to sum up and evaluate Illich's ideas by analyzing their strengths and weaknesses.

I hope by this thesis to offer a clearer picture of the problems debated by Illich and his opponents, as well as to offer a greater understanding of the influences that shaped his intellectual perspectives.

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## CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Often important worldwide events have unpredictable consequences that can affect the whole of mankind. One such unpredictable event was the rapid growth of population at the end of the second World War. The baby boom, occurring after the second World War, seemed to create an important imbalance in the overall composition of society. This imbalance was probably due to the fact that a very large segment of society was composed of very young people, who outnumbered their elders. The education of these youngsters, because it was too heavy a burden for their families, was left, in many cases, to the schools. Under these pressures, the school system failed to meet the general expectations of society. People learned of some high school graduates who could neither read nor write. Some parents even sued their local schools for not providing an adequate education for their children. There were many signs of a malaise in the system and well-known educators started giving alarm signals through the media. Articles were published and conferences were held as more and more educational thinkers joined in. Finally this problem reached the public at large and it became a general concern.

At this point in time, Ivan Illich, who was virtually unknown by the professionals in education, produced a book entitled, Deschooling Society.<sup>1</sup> In this book, Ivan Illich proposed to do away with the school system as such, denouncing the school as detrimental to

<sup>1</sup>Illich, Ivan D., Deschooling Society, N.Y.: Harrow Books (1972).

democracy and unfair to those who did not fit the system. Moreover, Illich's book seemed to respond to what looked like a pressing need at that time, and was proposed as an answer to the concern of many intellectuals. Furthermore, it came at the right time and therefore provoked a violent reaction worldwide. It seemed that every person involved in the educational field had something to say regarding Illich's theories.

Some people agreed with Illich's ideas, a few agreed only in part, yet many others took an opposing position. To some, Illich was a deluded "visionary"; to others he was a "prophet or a mystic"; to a third group he was an "agitator" and "wrongdoer", and to yet another group he was "just a passing fad".<sup>2</sup> In fact, so many people reacted, in such a variety of ways, to Illich's rationale and proposals, that the basic issues became blurred.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine carefully all the influences which contributed to Illich's personality and life experience. This author feels that there was a close relationship between Illich's upbringing, his ideas and his theories. Moreover, the thesis author believes that Illich's personality and intellectual ability played an important role in his development as well.

In order to be able to have a comprehensive idea of the causes influencing Illich's philosophy, this author believes that we should begin with his personal history and the factors that influenced him throughout his

<sup>2</sup>Didier J. Piveteau, "Illich: Enemy of Schools or School System?" Educational Review, Vol. 82:3, p. 394 (May, 1974).



life. In this respect, the questions one must ask in order to clarify this subject are:

- a) Who is Ivan Illich?
- b) In what kind of environment did he develop?
- c) What was the source of his social, economic and political philosophy?
- d) What social and intellectual influences molded his way of thinking?
- e) How did he arrive at the conclusion that schools should be abolished?

These questions will help to portray Ivan Illich as a real person and to clarify his views about society and education.

Due to the scarcity of biographical information about Ivan Illich, this paper is only a beginning to what could be done in terms of a more comprehensive study of this subject. The actual profile of Ivan Illich as presented by many writers has not necessarily depicted Illich as he really is. In other words, this thesis is just a tentative analysis of Illich's character, sources of belief, and philosophy. It does not pretend to be a definitive study of Ivan Illich. Yet, this author believes that it is very helpful to take a look at Illich as a person in a comprehensive way.

Ivan Illich is described by the people who meet him as a lanky figure with a long face having aquiline features, with a beak nose,

brown eyes, and exuding an aristocratic, Hapsburgic air about him. As a person, he displays a very complex personality. As a consequence he is sometimes difficult to understand. Hence, it is practically impossible to categorize him, because he is not following any common pattern of behaviour; therefore, he can be considered in the final analysis as "unpredictable".

According to many people who have met him, Illich displays "charisma". "charm", and an almost "hypnotizing" personality. Yet he can also be sarcastic as well as withdrawn, mystic, even cryptic or enigmatic. Often he may act as a charming, naive and tender person, showing a great deal of humility, but he is also able to be tough and cynical, almost rude, and even insulting. Moreover, Illich exhibits a mixture of profound piety, combined with diplomacy and "savoir faire", blended together with defiance and outspoken militancy. Furthermore, Illich is labelled, and probably rightfully so, as an "arrogant aristocrat" who nevertheless, has an obvious concern for the poor.<sup>3</sup>

Some of his activities indicate that there is a profoundly religious and mystical side to his character. For instance, sometimes he has prayed entire nights and has often fasted, gone on retreats, and pilgrimages. Another interesting aspect of his personality is his continuous effort to prove himself, which according to people who know him, borders on masochism. Illich seems to strike the people he meets as a brilliant person, highly educated, with an enormous background of knowledge. Being fluent in many languages, he has no problem in

<sup>3</sup>DuPlessis Gray, Francine, Divine Disobedience, N.Y.: New Yorker (1971), p. 282.

communicating with people. This unusual amalgam of features results in granting Illich a "sui generis" mien, which is consistent with the position of intellectual dissident he holds in the international community of educational thinkers.

## CHAPTER II. IVAN ILLICH'S INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT

## a) Early life and schooling

Ivan Illich was born in Vienna in 1926, the son of a wealthy landowner and engineer. He comes from a titled Dalmatian family, and according to Illich, his origins are: Spanish, German, Yugoslav and Jewish. From such a background, Illich inherited a facility to speak foreign languages; he actually speaks fifteen of them and he learned Portuguese in only three weeks. In addition to his linguistic aptitude, he inherited also a brilliant, inquisitive mind. His native intelligence was developed even further by the fact that he was born into a "nest" of intellectuals. His family evolved in a highly intellectual milieu composed of artists, scholars, progressive thinkers and thoughtful people in general. Rudolf Steiner and Reiner Maria Rilke were friends of his family. Since early childhood he had a very close relationship with Jacques Maritain. Maritain exerted, according to Illich, a great influence upon his formation.

From his younger days, through his readings and home influences, Illich acquired a religious orientation with a marked preference for the medieval religious philosophy. Following his religious penchant, Illich went to Rome where he was trained to be a priest, and where he earned a master's degree in theology and philosophy at the Gregorian

University. He also went to Salzburg where he studied crystallography and history. While in Salzburg, as part of his history studies, he wrote a thesis on Arnold Toynbee's work, The Cyclic Theory of Civilizations, which influenced him throughout his life.

Due to his brilliant studies and language skills, he was recommended by the Holy See for The Collegio Di Nobili Ecclesiastici, a training school for Vatican diplomats. Instead of going to this college, Illich chose to go as an assistant pastor to a predominantly Puerto Rican parish in New York.

#### b) Illich's early intellectual development

In order to give an account of Illich's intellectual development, I believe that the best way is to scrutinize the ideas and points of view which underlie his philosophy. These ideas were likely acquired the conventional way, either by personal contact with thinkers and philosophers, or through readings. Of course, the fact that he grew up in an intellectual environment helped him to acquire many concepts from his early childhood. Nevertheless, reading seems to have been the activity which stimulated young Illich's imagination and provided him with food for thought for further intellectual exploration. Ivan Illich was an avid reader since his very younger days and this played a vital role in his attaining a high level of erudition. Of course, all the acquired elements of knowledge were processed by his brilliant mind into a variety of concepts which formed his philosophy of life. Many

of these ideas can be traced back to some of the thinkers who contributed to Illich's intellectual development.

Illich's religious orientation appears to be a major factor in the development of his philosophy of life. The monastic component of Ivan Illich's religious orientation points to St. Bernard de Clairvaux, who transmitted to him the idea of withdrawal of the Church from secular life. Illich also integrated St. Bernard de Clairvaux's monastic ideas into his religious vision.

Dante Alighieri in his Duo Ultima proclaimed that religious regeneration leads to salvation, through membership in a religious community. This idea is entrenched in Illich's philosophy, and Dante's writings may be at its origin. Illich maintains that happiness in this world can be achieved through the conviviality of a religious community.

The idea of the superior dignity of the Church through exercising her pervading inspiration, comes probably to Illich from his lifetime friend Jacques Maritain. Maritain, as well as Henri Bergson, attained this concept from Thomas Aquinas. The religious commitment to freedom for the individual comes most probably from the same sources, Maritain and Bergson being firm believers in it.

Illich's idea of blind faith may come partially from several thinkers and philosophers like Buddha, Socrates, Rousseau, and Spengler, who believed that religion is a lived experience.

From his younger days then, Illich forged for himself an ideal concept of the medieval religious life, as he declares:

*"I am theologically profoundly conservative. I could teach with deep relish a course in pre-conciliar theology. I would like to have lived in the middle ages, one of the high points of man's spirit."*<sup>4</sup>

Illich's religious orientation is apparently so strongly embedded in his philosophy of life that his views on education and society in general are pervaded by his spiritual beliefs. His constant reference to the Catholic Church seems to indicate this fact.

Regarding some of his social concepts, we can presume, due to the similarity of ideas, that Tolstoy, as well as Rabelais, Montaigne and Rousseau, may have had an influence on Illich's ideas. Furthermore, his "paternal", tolerant attitude towards the poor was most likely initiated in his upper class family and social environment, possibly confirmed by reading Tolstoy and others. With this kind of intellectual background Illich went to Salzburg, for higher studies. In Salzburg, another important element influenced the development of Illich's ideas. This new element was Arnold Toynbee's work The Cyclic Theory of Civilizations. Toynbee had been influenced by Oswald Spengler's book The Decline of the West. Spengler, a great admirer of Isaiah and Heraclitus, wrote a thesis on declining civilizations, incorporating some of these thinkers' ideas into his book Der Untergang

<sup>4</sup>Idem., p. 275.

Des Abenlandes. Here, Spengler investigates the background and origins of our civilization. In this work, the recurrent theme advanced by Spengler is that a given civilization develops until it reaches a certain point. Then, the very same components which have contributed to the growth of this civilization became impediments to further development. The said civilization experiences an arrest in growth and starts declining until it disappears completely.

Toynbee, impressed by Spengler's theory, extended his research and studied twelve civilizations, arriving at the same conclusions, but in a much more documented manner. Ivan Illich wrote a thesis on Toynbee's work, internalizing some of its concepts in the process. Moreover, Illich seems to believe that our civilization is on the verge of facing an arrest of growth, and that the impeding elements responsible for this hindrance are our current institutions. Therefore, the logical conclusion drawn by Illich is that society should do away with these institutions. Toynbee also believes that in growing civilizations, due to the extensive development of agriculture and commercial enterprises, a characteristic byproduct is the rise of nonproductive élites, supported out of the economic surplus. This may provide some basis for Illich's idea of social inequality throughout the world. This concept which is repeated over and over again in Illich's writings, may also have some roots in Toynbee's theory that the human achievements in the technical sphere have created, over time, enormous differences in the standard of living of individuals, as well as nations.



Another important idea advanced by Toynbee, which may have influenced Illich, is the concept of the mechanicalness of mimesis. Toynbee dedicates a section of his book to this concept, the theme of manipulation of man by man, a theme which became one of the mainstays of Illich's social philosophy. Also, the idea of one elevating himself to a neutral, international level, may have also come from Toynbee, who says: "For the historian, his ancestral standing ground is an accidental impediment to seeing the global panorama in its true proportions."<sup>5</sup> Finally, one more common point which Illich shares with Toynbee is this obsessive concern with technology, especially the hatred of machines.

In order to pursue his studies and because of his religious inclination Illich went to Rome to be trained as a priest. During his training, he acquired a master's degree in theology and philosophy at the Gregorian University. While in Rome, Illich must have noticed that the Catholic Church also had its human side, which somehow did not fit his medieval religious image. This idea seems to be the reason why Illich went as a priest to New York, instead of joining the Collegio Di Nobili Ecclesiastici. While discussing the conditions of a priest's life and aspirations, Illich was challenged by some of his peers at the University for not being able to "make it" in New York. Out of a spirit of contradiction, as well as a drive to prove himself, but probably mainly due to his disenchantment with the religious life in

<sup>5</sup>Toynbee, Arnold, A Study of History, N.Y.: American Heritage Press (1972), p. 10.

Rome, Illich took the challenge.<sup>6</sup> The more logical step for Illich to follow was to have joined the Collegio, and then to pursue a brilliant career as a Vatican diplomat, in conformity with his highly intellectual background, as well as his cerebral potential.

This unusual move to New York seems to suggest a possible conflict between the mundane aspects of the daily life of the Vatican diplomats and Illich's highly idealistic views of the Church. Interestingly enough, some of the people associated with the Vatican pride themselves on their special mentality, which they call Romanita. This mentality did not seem to suit Illich's idea of the clergy, because following his departure from Rome he begins to attack the Church establishment.

The U.S. authorities, recognizing the potential danger of an eventual communist takeover in South America, decided to turn Puerto Rico, which had the status of a commonwealth associated with the U.S., into a showcase for Latin America. As a result, many U.S. companies opened branches in Puerto Rico and many Puerto Ricans emigrated to the U.S., mainly to New York city. When Illich arrived in New York, a mass of Puerto Rican emigrants formed a sort of ghetto around Fordham Square. At that time, the religious center of this enclave was the parish of the Incarnacion, which was under the spiritual guidance of a few American priests. These priests were mostly of Irish descent and could not understand the mentality of these Latin newcomers. The priests were annoyed by these parishioners who were not used to arriving in time for the mass, who did not take official papers

<sup>6</sup>DuPlessis, *op. cit.* p. 243.

seriously, and who had a fatalistic outlook on life. The priests from Incarnacion tried to force the American way of life upon the new immigrants and the consequence was that the Puerto Ricans deserted the Church. The hierarchy of the Catholic Church was concerned with this situation and did not know what strategy to use in order to reintegrate the Puerto Ricans into the parish.

Illich, the newcomer, understood the situation and took the side of the new immigrants. His original disappointment with the clergy in Rome grew to such an extent that he openly sided with the Puerto Ricans. The attitude of the American-Irish priests towards the new parishioners shocked Illich and compelled him to take action. From being a rebel without a cause, he turned into a fervent supporter of the Puerto Ricans. In a very short period of time he learned Spanish and did everything possible to get acquainted with his parishioners. Moreover, he published articles denouncing the prejudice of the Incarnacion clergy against the Puerto Rican people, for whom he had developed a strong empathy. Being an immigrant himself, he readily understood the predicament of these people. They were poor, disoriented, and were facing a way of life they did not comprehend. Through personal contacts, Illich absorbed as much as he could of the Puerto Rican culture. In order to become more familiar with the Puerto Rican way of life, Illich spent his holidays in Puerto Rico hitchhiking through the island and talking to the people. As a consequence of these activities, Illich became the Puerto Ricans' champion and spokes-

man in the Catholic Church. His greatest accomplishment in this respect was the establishment of the Puerto Rican day in New York, La Fiesta Patronal de San Juan, which was a tremendous success from the very beginning. The fact that many Puerto Ricans rejoined the Catholic Church was largely attributable to Illich's efforts.

Ivan Illich became a naturalized U.S. citizen and made many friends in that country. Moreover, Illich was appreciated by Cardinal Cushman of Boston and gained the sympathy of Father Fitzpatrick and his Jesuit colleagues at Fordham University. Cardinal Spellman, noticing the revival of faith among the Puerto Rican immigrants, put Illich in charge of the department of Hispanic affairs of the archdiocese. Furthermore, Illich was elevated to the rank of Monsignor, and in 1955 was sent to Puerto Rico as vice rector of the Catholic University. In his capacity as vice rector, Ivan Illich realized that there were many problems existing in the educational field and became interested in this field. During this period of time Everett Reimer was also in Puerto Rico and was probably instrumental in initiating Illich into certain problems of education. During his stay in Puerto Rico, Illich had a chance to get acquainted with the so called South American reality. By living every day with the Puerto Rican people and by talking to his students, he further refined his knowledge and understanding of their problems. Furthermore, Illich read a book written by Father François Houtard and Father Emile Pin, entitled "Sociological Survey Of The Situation In Latin America". This book

probably planted in Illich's mind the idea of the ideological colonization of South America by the U.S. This was a logical extension of the situation witnessed by him at the Incarnacion parish in New York, where the Puerto Ricans were forced by American priests into adopting the American way of life. As a consequence, Illich published The Seamy Side Of Charity,<sup>7</sup> in the Jesuit magazine America, condemning U.S. intrusion into South American affairs. Furthermore, he established The Institute For Intercultural Communication, which had as an objective the introduction of American priests to Latin American culture. Unfortunately, Illich's avant gardist ideas were noticed by the Puerto Rican clergy. Consequently, when he supported the pro-abortion position of the governor Marin Monoz, he was ordered out of Puerto Rico by Bishop McManus of San Juan.

#### c) Realizing the dream

From Puerto Rico, Illich went to his Jesuit friends at Fordham University. After a short period of teaching at Fordham University in New York, Illich decided to follow his dream of establishing a free school according to his ideas. In order to find a suitable place he travelled along the western coast of South America until he met Bishop Mendez Arceo in Mexico. With the Bishop's help, Illich established in Cuernavaca, Mexico the Centro Cultural de Documentacion. This center was initially conceived with the idea of preparing the American missionaries for their work with the South American people. This

<sup>7</sup>DuPlessis, *op. cit.*, p. 291.

preparation was supposed to consist mainly of language training and also of introducing the missionaries to the South American mentality and way of life. Illich turned the center into a forum for progressive thinkers, especially in education.

At the Centro Cultural de Documentacion Illich met many progressive personalities and his reformist opinions became more solidly entrenched. The Centro became a means of fighting against the cultural colonization of South America, a "de-yankeefication" place, with the aim of dissuading all antiprogressist missionaries from going to South America. The orientation of the new establishment attracted the attention of the Catholic clergy in Mexico, as well as the concern of the local authorities. Due to a strong opposition to the curriculum and the general atmosphere of the school, Catholic priests were barred from attending it. Later on, Illich was summoned to the Vatican in order to answer charges that through his writings and lectures, he had fostered an anti-Church movement at C.I.D.O.C.

In 1968 he went to the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith in Rome to answer these charges laid against him by the officials of the Catholic Church in Mexico. The subsequent inquiry ended inconclusively and later on, the Church investigators were relieved of their function. Illich felt vindicated and his beliefs grew even stronger. Consistent with his principles, he resigned voluntarily from priesthood and asked the Holy Father in a letter to be allowed to continue his vow of celibacy and to retain the privilege of reading his breviary daily.

More recently, Illich turned his attention to the problems created by our industrial society. These problems are raised in his last book H2O And The Waters Of Forgetfulness.<sup>8</sup> According to the latest available information, Ivan Illich is currently lecturing at the University of Gottingen and also holds the position of Associate Director of the Centro Cultural de Documentacion in Cuernavaca, Mexico.

<sup>8</sup> Illich, Ivan D., H2O and the Waters of Forget-fulness, London: Marion Boyars Publishers Ltd., 1986.

### CHAPTER 3. IVAN ILLICH'S BELIEFS AS A PRODUCT OF HIS ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCES AND HIS DEVELOPING IDEALS

It is common knowledge that every person draws his convictions and beliefs, first from the immediate environment, family and family's friends, later on from school e.g. peers, teachers, and finally from life experiences. These beliefs may have an indefinite form at the beginning, shaping up due to one's life experiences, and finally ending as firm convictions when the individual reaches the stage of intellectual maturity.

For an active, inquisitive mind, this process of reassessing one's beliefs never ends, and this seems to be the case with Ivan Illich. Being an avid reader since his younger days, Illich perused a lot of religious, philosophical and social writings during his formative period, which developed into mature concepts as a consequence. However, a definite characteristic of Illich's personality is that he is what K. Bereiter and L. Kaufmann from O.I.S.E. refer to as an "authentic man". In other words, Illich's mind decides which information has to be pursued, and to what extent, he processes this information in his mind without interference, and only when he arrives at a genuine conclusion, does he act upon it. This method combined with his unusual background and his brilliant intellectual capacity contributes to Illich's uniqueness and places him in a special category which is philosophically difficult to label.



In order to bring some light into this matter, I will focus on the following aspects of Illich's personality and beliefs:

- a) Illich's religious beliefs;
- b) Illich's social philosophy;
- c) Illich's views on education.

a) Illich's religious beliefs

Due to the influence of St. Bernard de Clairvaux, and other thinkers, Illich was confirmed in his religious beliefs which focused on the medieval ideal of the Church and its role in the community. Furthermore, being perhaps a firm supporter of Clairvaux's monastic conception of religion, Illich probably realized that things were somewhat different in reality when he went to Rome to be trained as a priest. His subsequent attitude and writings as well as his departure to New York, suggest that his conception of the role of the clergy was not satisfied by the actual organization of the Church. Furthermore, the situation he witnessed in New York at the Incarnation parish forced him to take a stand. At that period of time, he wrote: "What is preventing authentic religious life from taking place is the bureaucratization of the Church and the existence of a class of professional churchmen."<sup>9</sup> This violent reaction of Illich's suggests a deep frustration engendered perhaps by the discrepancy between his religious vision and the existing situation.

<sup>9</sup> Elias L., John, Conscientization and Deschooling, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press (1976), pp. 26-27.

Being a profoundly religious man, Illich found himself many times going against the trend and at odds with the Catholic Church. He declares:

*"The modern humanist does not need the gospel as a norm; the Christian wants to remain free to find through the gospel a dimension of effective surprise beyond and above the humanistic reason which motivates social action."*<sup>10</sup>

In order to further scrutinize Illich's religious beliefs, we should perhaps investigate his religious vision. Illich's religious vision provides a basis for all his criticism of modern institutions, including the Church. In the monastic tradition of St. Bernard de Clairvaux, Illich envisages a Church which disregards human weaknesses and turns towards "the kingdom of God". In all his writings regarding religion, Illich, in his prophet-like style appeals to the churchmen to go back to the basics of the Christian faith. He also envisages for the future a Church which serves small communities, run by dedicated individuals who are interested in an authentic religious life. Hence, in his opinion, these communities will be united and maintained by faith. In Illich's view, the Church is the mystical body of Christ, providing the basic force for social cohesion. Moreover, the Church's strength should reside only in its powerlessness. In this respect, Illich warns that the Church's self understanding is her unique mission

<sup>10</sup> Illich, Ivan, Celebration of Awareness, New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc. (1970), p. 102.

and a program of action would associate the notion of the Church with that particular program. Hence, noninvolvement is advocated for the Church by Illich, in order that it can acquire and maintain its supreme moral authority.

As for the priest, Illich sees him presiding over the celebration of the sacraments, instead of being involved in social action and community affairs. Furthermore, Illich thinks that for the priest to perform other functions is most probably to "feign competence" because a priest is not trained and in most cases not prepared to assume such tasks. Being a Christian humanist, Illich's overwhelming confidence in man's potentiality to do good runs throughout his religious vision.

Illich visualizes for the future a man whom he calls the "Epithemean man" as opposed to the "Promethean man" who is at the base of the actual institutions. In his idealistic vision, Illich refers constantly to the "Promethean man" who tries to control the environment through different devices and ends up being controlled by these very devices. The opposite of the Promethean man, the Epithemean man is conceived by Illich as a man who lives in harmony with nature. According to Illich, the Epithemean man will emerge without outside intervention. Obviously, Illich thinks of the two sides of man in a very idealistic way. The concept of the Epithemean man looks very much like the Dionysian man of Nietzsche who was as well accorded idealistically supernatural powers. One cannot refrain from thinking that perhaps Illich was influenced in his vision by the German

philosopher.

Illich's religious vision includes also the notion of man's freedom similar to the line of thought of Tolstoy and more especially Jacques Maritain. Moreover, Illich's image of man is full of expectation and hope, although, at the same time, he criticizes all the bad things created by man, especially human institutions. In his reproach of these institutions, Illich's main charge is that in our society man is manipulated; he loses his freedom and he is also alienated from his work. In judging these human institutions, Illich uses the criterion of "What is best for man". Every institution is examined from this standpoint of conviviality and according to Illich, they all fail the test. In Illich's opinion our current social institutions hinder man's capacity for greater aliveness and joy, due to the manipulative tendencies of our current institutions. Instead of these manipulative institutions, Illich sees the Church as providing a cohesive structure through the religious faith, which will help in reinstating a convivial society. In the final analysis, Illich's religious vision seems to be derived from the Medieval ideal of the Church, as Timothy Reagan says:

*"These religious metaphors and dozens like them, show the extent to which his religious faith permeates Illich's life and thought. Not only is this compatible with the medieval ideal, but is actually quite close to the monastic ideal of the medieval era."*<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup>Reagan, Timothy, *The Foundations of Ivan Illich's Thought, Educational Theory*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (Fall, 1980), p. 2.

## b) Illich's social philosophy

As we have noted, Illich's social views are pervaded by a religious element which is omnipresent in his concept of the world. This religious component carries a medieval touch which is also as we have seen an integral part of Illich's philosophy.

Illich interprets the dichotomy of the individual versus society according to his medieval social philosophy. He attempts to solve the difficult task of maintaining the rights of the individual while asserting the rights of the collectivity as well. Illich, in his social philosophy, sees the community as a cooperative endeavour of individuals who are accepted as having their independent existence within this community. Moreover, the ideal society envisioned by Illich maintains the role of religion as an inherent component of social and individual life. Religion, according to Illich, is a necessary part of society and its role is to comfort and heal the individual in need, while it offers a cohesive frame which holds the community together through faith.

In Illich's view of society the social institutions should be convivial, meaning that these institutions should contribute to the well-being of the individual, instead of "oppressing" and "alienating" him.<sup>12</sup> Illich would like to develop, through these institutions, a real concern in the individuals for each other in the tradition of St. Thomas Aquinas (Love thy neighbour as thyself.).

<sup>12</sup> Illich, Ivan, Tools for Conviviality, N.Y.: Harper & Row (1973), p. xii.

Illich's whole concept of social life has obviously a medieval flavor. Timothy Regan says that Illich's description of "learning webs", which play a major role in his conception of the deschooled society, calls manorial life to mind.<sup>13</sup> Finally, Illich deplores the actual situation in society where man becomes the servant of his own creations, namely the social institutions and technology. As an end to this state of affairs, Illich predicts an increased spirituality in mankind's humanity, along with dignity and joyfulness.

In all his critiques Illich uses a dialectical approach. He insists on the contradictions between social equality and continued industrial growth which in turn results in loss of freedom for the individual; and ends up by offering his own solution. According to Illich, the only cure for the actual deplorable state of affairs in society is to return to the basics. In this respect, Illich attracts the criticism of many people in the educational field who believe that he oversimplifies the problem with his proposal of liberation from affluence and dependence.

Many thinkers believe that the relationship between the individual and the group is not adequately studied by Illich. By declaring that the individual is good and the institution is bad, Illich eradicates the possibility of further dialogue or compromise. Moreover, being idealistic, Illich disregards the animal in man; therefore, he arrives at false conclusions because he does not take into account all of the components. In his vision, Illich stresses the need for social

<sup>13</sup>Regan, *op. cit.*, p. 299.

cooperation with emphasis on individual personal responsibility. Therefore, Illich trusts the individual to make ethical decisions according to the moral law. By the same token, by allowing individuals to have their own moral guide, the moral rights of the community over the individual become limited.

c) Ivan Illich's views on education

Illich was sensitized to the educational problems by Everett Reimer, whom he met in Puerto Rico. At that time, Illich was Vice Rector at the Puerto Rico University. As mentioned previously, when Illich started to look into the matter of educational problems, he soon discovered that the same pattern of weaknesses found by him in the organization of the Catholic Church is reproduced in education. Therefore, he proceeded to examine the contemporary educational process, according to his former experiences with the Catholic Church. All the drawbacks experienced by Illich in the Catholic Church are found by him in education as well.

Ivan Illich is an educator whose analysis of the existing system of education as well as his extreme solution to improve this system makes him one of the most controversial figures on the contemporary educational scene. Illich ably elaborates some of the difficulties undermining the school system as we know it as he delves into the area where education meets economic and social reality. He is attacked by his critics on the grounds that the good points of his philosophy are

often obscure. Also, many people in the field of education resent his boldness and extremism in regard to his alternatives to education including his advocacy of deschooling as a remedy for society.

Illich presents his theory of education in a dialectical way. In the first place he begins by stressing the shortcomings and problems encountered by the existing system. Then he elaborates on these shortcomings, and as a logical consequence of his criticism he calls for the eradication of the school system. Furthermore, in order to fill the void created by the abolition of this system, he offers an alternative to it.

The main points of Illich's criticism of the school system are:

1) The school fails to deliver what it promises. It confuses teaching with learning, grade advancement with education, a diploma with competence, and fluency with the ability to say something new.

2) It perpetuates the myth that only the school system can provide education to the people, uses all the resources available, and tries to create for itself a monopoly of education. In Illich's own words, "School appropriates the money, men, and good will available for education and in addition discourages other institutions from assuming educational tasks."<sup>14</sup>

3) As with any other institution, the school system tends to create the need for more such institutions. Schooling becomes a scientifically produced commodity, which is increasingly needed, in

<sup>14</sup> Illich, Ivan, Deschooling Society, p. 11.



order to produce more "educated people" who, in turn, want more schools in order to "educate" their own children.

In his criticism of the school system, Illich believes that the school can be analyzed in terms of the following functions:

a) Custodial care

Illich states that in the actual operation of the school system, the excess population is taken from the street, family, and labour force. This function may serve some social need of the existing society, but falls short of fulfilling the school's main purpose, which is to educate.

b) Stratification of society

This is done on the basis of schooling. The school system, through a deliberate, planned sorting, promotes a social role selection, based on the ideology of merit. This stratification contributes further to injustice in society.

c) Indoctrination of the young into the social order

The social order is seen by Illich as fundamentally unjust, since it is based on acceptance of social conformity, consumerism, and the ideology of merit. According to Illich, all these elements serve to perpetuate social ills.

d) Education of the young

In Illich's opinion, this should promote the personal growth of the student. However, Illich argues that instead of promoting personal growth, the school goes through a mechanical process of passing facts and information to the students, therefore merely indoctrinating them, instead of teaching them.

In the context of education, Ivan Illich believes that students feel oppressed in schools for a number of reasons. Some of these reasons are:

1) Compulsory attendance

This, in Illich's opinion, is opposed to man's innate drive for freedom. Illich views compulsory attendance as having no positive function. According to Illich, it has the negative effect of perpetuating itself. Illich also thinks that the compulsory school tends to divide society into two groups:

a) The educated, who benefit from all the advantages of modern society, because of their education, and

b) The non-educated, who are subject to all the disadvantages that this lack of education entails in the existing social framework.

In addition this situation leads to a grading of the nations of the world, according to an international caste system. Countries are

rated by the average years of schooling of their citizens.

2) A fixed curriculum

Students feel oppressed because they are subjected to a fixed curriculum. Over this curriculum the students have no control, nor say. According to Illich, not everyone wants to learn the same thing. Even if all students do want to learn the same thing, they don't want to learn it at the same time. Therefore, the fixed curriculum destroys the individual's desire for independent learning, and it is detrimental to self-realization.

3) A hidden curriculum

The students also feel oppressed because they are subjected to a hidden curriculum. This hidden curriculum serves as a ritual of initiation into a growth-oriented consumer society for rich and poor alike. Values and myths are conveyed by the school to the students, through the hidden curriculum, that is, without being part of any course.

The school, in Illich's opinion, covertly teaches us to gauge the worth of an idea primarily or exclusively by reference to its practicality. In this manner, the hidden curriculum serves as a ritual initiation to society. According to Illich, there is an inescapable connection between school and the hidden curriculum. Schools, as they exist today, cannot avoid the inculcation of the hidden curriculum, and

<sup>15</sup>*Idem.*, p. 48.

the effects of such a curriculum are necessarily unwholesome. Along the same line of thought, Illich believes that "school also teaches children to confuse education with learning".<sup>16</sup> According to Illich, this confusion actually transcends all strata of society, being communicated as a hidden message throughout the school system. In addition, the hidden curriculum creates alienation of the student. The students are alienated by the schools through the imposed curriculum, through the grading system and also through the structure imposed on their available time. This is done without their consent or will. Illich believes that the result of this alienation is that the students are molded according to other people's requirements, contrary to their drive for self-realization. Illich elaborates further on this alienation process saying that "school makes alienation preparatory for life".<sup>17</sup>

In other words, schools are pre-alienating the students in order to have them accept class distinction and further alienation in society. The hidden curriculum is viewed by Illich as carrying a subliminal message that institutions, especially the existing ones, are absolutely necessary. Hence, the general reluctance to question the necessity of the existing institutions. Finally, Illich thinks that the school system as we know it, became a manipulative tool for the benefit of certain elements in society. All these weaknesses of the institutional system of learning exposed above, are considered by Illich as conducive to his conclusion that the school system should be

<sup>16</sup> *Idem.*, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> *Idem.*, p. 67.

abolished. Moreover, Illich believes that schools are chiefly responsible for producing the demands that can be satisfied by industry. "Therefore," he says, "abolish schools and you abolish the demand that keeps the capitalist enterprise alive."<sup>18</sup>

Continuing his argument, Illich says that school prepares for the alienating institutionalization of life by teaching the need to be taught. And at the same time schools isolate (young people) from the world of work and pleasure, making it impossible for them to grow in independence and to find relatedness attractive. In other words, Illich feels that young people are robbed of their freedom by the hidden curriculum. Hence, deschooling is at the root of any movement of liberation.

### The Alternative

In order to fill the void left by the eradication of schools, Illich proposes an alternative.<sup>19</sup> He believes that education should be an "unhampered participation in a meaningful setting". He conceives of a system which is liberated from the accesses to education by abolishing the control exercised over it by present administrators and experts. Illich considers every individual as a separate entity, who is free to decide the course and direction which he wants to take in life. He wants for every individual the freedom to teach as well as the right to call meetings and to choose the teacher of his choice.

<sup>18</sup> Manners, Robert A., *Ivan Illich: Schooling and Society*, Teachers College Record, Vol. 76, No. 4 (May, 1975).

<sup>19</sup> *Idem.*, p. 103.

In order to implement his educational theory, Illich advocates the establishment of a network of educational webs. These webs will take the form of educational centres where all those who want to share their knowledge are allowed to do so. All those who want to learn will have access to the available resources, such as tape recorders, televisions, computers, films, models, peers, and also elderly experienced people. In addition, Illich advocates reference services through educational objects, skill exchanges, peer matching (through a communication network with telephone, computer, ads, etc.), and reference services to professional educators and resource persons.

Illich's alternative contains also a system of reference persons who can direct the individuals the same way today's reference librarians function. In these webs, people will learn in companies, without restraints such as attendance, grades, etc. This will break down the dependence of the students on a bureaucratic system by which they are indoctrinated.

The deschooling of society is considered by Illich as a necessity, in order to bring people back to authenticity and equality. He stresses the need for the individual in society to function as independently as possible, and he also emphasizes self-realization for this individual. Illich considers that the only drawback for his alternative is the fact that the very people who were brought up in schools, would have to be the ones to oversee the "deschooling" of society.

## CHAPTER IV. MAJOR CONTROVERSY OVER IVAN ILLICH'S THEORIES

The controversy over Ivan Illich's theories reached a very high level, due to a variety of factors, according to his critics. In this controversy, the most inflammatory among these elements was the boldness of his attacks and some of his unsubstantiated assertions. Moreover the main factor that provokes all these critiques is the fact that Illich insists on being overly extreme and assertive. There are many points where Illich disagrees with everybody. Actually, many people think that Illich goes against the trend. He is not a socialist, not a Marxist, not an anarchist, and not a capitalist either. He is unique. Therefore many critics have an "ax to grind" with him.

Among his strongest critics is Herbert Gintis who represents, in this context, the western Marxist point of view. Gintis is thorough in his criticism of Illich's theories and debates them point by point.

## a) Herbert Gintis' commentary

In his article, "Towards a Political Economy of Education: A Radical Critique of Ivan Illich Deschooling Society",<sup>20</sup> Herbert Gintis describes Illich's work as an attempt to discover and analyze the roots of "decay", as he calls it, of the advanced industrial societies. According to Gintis, Illich's theories provide the social scientist (Gintis was probably thinking of the Marxist theoreticians)

<sup>20</sup> Gintis, Herbert, *Towards A Political Economy Of Education: A Radical Critique of Ivan Illich's Deschooling Society*, Harvard Educational Review 42, N.1 (February, 1972), pp. 70-96.

with an opportunity to consider, in an organized way, our contemporary social context and advocate a radical change for the future. Moreover, Gintis appreciates Illich's work as a genuine attempt to liberate the learning technologies, while presenting an avant garde picture of a new philosophy in the implementation of the educational process. In general, Gintis agrees that Illich's description of modern society is sufficiently critical, but he has some reservations. He says:

*"It is crucial that educators and students who have been attracted to him (Illich) for his message does correspond to their personal frustration and disillusionment, move beyond him."*<sup>21</sup>

The main quarrel Gintis has with Illich's theories is that Illich does not consider the malaise of society in depth. Therefore, instead of finding the real causes of this malaise, Illich addresses himself to some external effects of these causes. Hence the result of his findings is a distorted view of the flaws within the social process and their sources. In Gintis' opinion Illich's theories fall short of encompassing the magnitude of the need for structural reforms in society. Furthermore, according to Gintis, Illich mis-locates the sources of the social problems and value crisis of modern society, in the need to reproduce alienated patterns of consumption. In Gintis' opinion, these are merely manifestations of the deeper workings of the economic system.

<sup>21</sup> *Idem.*, p. 18.



Gintis states that Illich's overemphasis on consumption leads him to a very partial understanding of the functions of the educational system. Therefore Illich's educational alternatives are ineffective and his strategies for implementation are untenable. In other words, Illich misses the point, due to his failure to understand the situation as a whole. Moreover, Gintis maintains that the deschooling theory is relevant only when it is part of a total process of social reconstruction. Otherwise, says Gintis, the deschooling exercise is operating in a vacuum.

On the other hand, Gintis gives Illich credit for realizing that the internal irrationalities of modern education are a reflection of society. Hence, Illich sees the schools as exemplary models of bureaucracy geared towards the indoctrination of docile and malleable consumers. Furthermore, Gintis accepts Illich's contribution to the fight against the existing social setup and he declares that Illich extends the idea of addictive manipulation to the realm of service and welfare bureaucracies. In Gintis' opinion, Illich is right when he asserts that these two kinds of institutions create the demand for more institutions of the same kind. Continuing his argument, Gintis considers Illich's model of consumption-manipulation as substantially incorrect for the following reasons:

- 1) Illich locates the source of social decay in the autonomous manipulative behavior of corporate bureaucracies.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 10.

Gintis argues that the source of social unbalance is built into the normal operation of the basic economic institutions of capitalism. According to Gintis, in the western economic system, the accumulation of capital and growth of marketable services prevails over the healthy development of society in terms of education, environment, and social equality. Moreover, stopping the manipulation while maintaining the basic capitalistic institutions, won't cure the illness.

2) Illich believes that the source of consumer consciousness lies in the manipulative socialization of the individuals by different agencies subservient to the big corporations. These agencies lure the individuals away from their real needs and persuade them to appropriate needs in conformity with the interest of welfare bureaucracies.<sup>23</sup>

Gintis maintains that the socialization agencies are not generating the "so-called commodity fetishism"; they merely capitalize upon it. Instead of manipulating the people, these agencies are reconfirming the individuals in their induced values through their daily activities and experiences. Hence, the disappearance of the addictive propaganda will not have as a result the liberation of the people from manipulation. Once again, Gintis insists that the evil lies in the pattern of social processes. Moreover, argues Gintis, the "commodity fetishism" is functionally necessary to motivate people in order to participate in the system of the alienated production. Due to the myth of "commodity fetishism" promoted by capitalistic institu-

<sup>23</sup> *Idem.*, p. 10.

tions, people follow the general trend and sell their creative abilities to the said institutions, and bear allegiance to an economic system which is detrimental to their well-being and freedom. According to Gintis, without eradicating the wanton institutions of capitalism, it is useless to stop the manipulation of values, as Illich advocates. With reference to Illich's idea that institutions should be changed according to the criterion of non-addictiveness, Gintis reiterates his axiom that manipulation and addictiveness are not the source of social decay, and therefore the whole exercise of abolishing these practices in society would be futile. Furthermore the idea of implementing the more convivial forms of welfare and service agencies does not cure the basic illness of society. Moreover, Gintis argues that these agencies being part of the capitalist institutions, Illich by the mere fact of intending to use them, explicitly accepts these institutions. In conclusion, Gintis states that Illich's criterion must be replaced by a system whereby, through a democratic participation in all forms of social outcomes such as factories, schools, media, etc., people retain control over their lives.<sup>24</sup>

Many critics accused Illich of making unsubstantiated allegations. While he criticizes Illich, Gintis falls into the same trap, by making statements without proof. Regarding the unalienated production, Gintis states that this must be the result of the revolutionary transformation of the basic institutions. By the same token, Gintis asserts that Illich agrees with this tenet, by virtue of his theory of deschooling.

<sup>24</sup>*Idem.*, p. 11.

Illich's theory that public service bureaucracies are at the root of social problems is contested by Gintis. Illich holds that service agencies (including schools) fail because they are manipulative and expand because they are psychologically addictive. Gintis declares that public services do not fail. They expand because this is a primary characteristic of the system and not a result of addiction. Their failure to deal with the causes engenders the social problems. Moreover, Gintis pretends that the normal operation of the basic capitalistic institutions aggravates the social problems. Therefore it requires the expansion of these institutions even further.<sup>25</sup>

With regard to the problems of consumption, Gintis refutes Illich's emphasis on "institutionalized values". In Gintis' opinion, the individual's acquired attitude towards consumption prevails as social expression among other alternatives. Furthermore, Gintis states that what Illich sees as an irrational preoccupation with income and consumption, actually is the only substitute to work satisfaction and meaningful social relationships (which are no longer possible). Hence, says Gintis, "commodity fetishism" remains the only practicable option to community activities which are already extinct.

Concluding his argument, Gintis reiterates that this excessive consumption is not an aberration induced by manipulative agencies, as Illich pretends, but a mere replacement for human activities which are no more in effect.

<sup>25</sup> *Idem.*, p. 12.

Illich asserts that the main problem of contemporary society is the psychological impotence of the individual. According to Illich, this psychological impotence is due to the "addictiveness" generated and maintained by the corporate and state bureaucracies. Furthermore, Illich reasserts his criterion of "non-addictiveness" as the only cure against manipulation.

Gintis argues further that the criterion of non-addictiveness is perhaps working with regard to services, but it falls short of being effective when applied to the complex problems of contemporary society as a whole. In Gintis' opinion, the individuals, by participating in their contemporary social forms, change themselves, in order to conform to the requirements of society. Therefore, he thinks that the actual social context turns people into docile creatures who never reach their full potential because they have to bow to the needs of the very society to which they belong.

Illich is attacked by Gintis on the grounds that, in Illich's theory, work is not addictive because it is only a means for the individuals to provide for their consumption needs.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, according to Illich, in a capitalist context, work not being addictive, poses no threat to the workers' freedom. In Gintis' opinion, work is necessarily addictive in the larger sense because it defines the position of the individual in society. This is one more example of Gintis' assertion about Illich's theories that he does not cover the entire spectrum of the matter, arriving sometimes at a distorted conclusion. Furthermore, Gintis asserts

<sup>26</sup>*Idem.*, p. 13.

that there is no "human nature" prior to social experience. Therefore he discards Illich's concept of the individual (or his human nature for that matter) as nonsense. In Gintis' opinion, the individuals develop socially only after their interaction with society. In other words, according to Gintis, society changes the individuals through this process of interaction.

Moreover, Gintis recognizes that Illich is right in his belief that the developing technology may help either the oppression or the liberation of the people. However, Gintis does not agree with Illich's idea that ideal developments of technology and institutions will occur simply by removing the addictive element. Also, Illich's proposal to leave the control of developing technology to a few individuals is not applauded by Gintis. Moreover, Gintis argues that the concept of leaving the developing technology in the hands of a few individuals has proven to be undesirable in the capitalist system. In Gintis' idea, in a system like that, the consumers are left at the mercy of a small elite, who decide what should be developed and in which way. In that case, the citizens have no choice but to assume a passive role and select what suits their needs, among the options offered by the system. In this matter, Gintis, who is consistent in his idea of radical change, proposes to substitute Illich's criterion of left conviviality with the criterion of unalienated social outcomes. According to this criterion, individuals assume direct control over technology and influence their immediate environment and develop in this manner a better understanding of their needs in the process.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> *Idem.*, p. 14.

Regarding the problem of deschooling, Illich sees the school as a reflection of the society at large, with all the drawbacks of the other social institutions. According to him, the school, like any other institution, is manipulative, and obstructs the way for education outside the system. Moreover, the school fails by its very nature, like any other institution in our society, and becomes more expensive, but the more it fails, the more it expands, and the more society depends upon it. In Illich's words:

*"The escalation of the schools is as destructive as the escalation of weapons but less visibly so. Everywhere in the world school costs have risen faster than enrollment and faster than the GNP."*<sup>28</sup>

Gintis argues that Illich fails to realize that schools are useless. On the contrary, Gintis says, Illich just affirms that schools create passive people who are easy to manipulate. Furthermore, these people, once they agree to the idea of school being necessary, accept the whole system as a package and will comply with all the institutional requirements of society, relinquishing their freedom and authenticity in the process. Illich insists on the effect of the hidden curriculum and its long-lasting influence. Furthermore, with the hidden curriculum, says Illich, the school introduces the student to the social relations and the myths of the society at large.

Gintis argues that Illich misconceives the actual role of the hidden curriculum. For Gintis, the hidden curriculum does not reproduce the social relations of consumption, but the social relations of production, and the latter are important in regard to the hidden curriculum.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, it was mentioned by economists that the school provides the labor force with the necessary introduction to the youngsters. In the same line of thought, Gintis asserts that industry and other capitalist enterprises reward economically its workers according to their degree of schooling. Continuing his argument, Gintis explains how the hidden curriculum eases up the students in their further activities in the labour force:

1) The students are rewarded through grades if they display attitudes considered suitable by the capitalist system.

2) The organization of the school duplicates the existing situation in society, stratifying the school population according to their learning ability and indoctrinates the students to adopt a similar situation in society.

3) The school system generates a labour force pre-molded psychologically in order to satisfy the needs of the capitalist society.

<sup>29</sup>*Idem.*, p. 15.



As a conclusion to his argument, Gintis declares that while Illich can describe the flaws of contemporary education, his obsession with consumerism impairs his ability to understand how the system works.

Gintis fights Illich's theory that deschooling is the beginning for human liberation by arguing that school is just a preparation for further social activities. In Gintis' idea, the individual has to be oriented towards his future activity in society and learning webs have to be created. This has to be done, according to Gintis, through a special section of education, controlled by masters as well as students, eventually in the form of learning webs. Gintis characterizes Illich's notion of learning webs as anarchistic, probably because it does not include the idea of joint control of the masters and students as well.

Another aspect presented by Gintis in this matter is the concept of the "transitional society". As it is suggested by its name, the<sup>30</sup> transitional society contains a mechanism whereby a process of changing over is in effect. That means that the technological and cultural forms of the capitalistic society will eventually evolve towards forms in accordance with the ideal society, with no flaws. This major change will require, in Gintis' opinion, the cooperation and active participation between the managers, who are interested in the overall development of the enterprise, the technicians, who are interested in the logistics of production, and the workers, who are concerned with the influence of these changes over the job quality. Gintis believes that the contemporary educational system is not geared to develop in the students the necessary

<sup>30</sup>*Idem.*, p. 16.

skills required in order to be instrumental in changing the actual social relations in production and society.

Gintis criticizes Illich's alternative for the actual educational system on the grounds that it does not consider the necessary struggle among the elements involved in the process of restructuring the system. Moreover, Gintis states that Illich simply avoids any reference to the task of preparing the students for the struggle of restructuration of the school system. Furthermore, Illich is criticized by Gintis for the slenderness of his vision in the realm of education and gives as an example Cuba and China. According to Gintis, Illich fails to consider all the variables in the context and simply states that these two countries have failed in their educational reform because they have not deschooled. Gintis argues that these countries were virtually deschooled before their respective revolutions. Illich, in Gintis' view, correctly assesses the importance of interrelations between different elements in education, but, because he falls short of counting all the variables, his theory does not apply in these cases (Cuba and China).<sup>31</sup>

Gintis further attacks Illich on the premises that deschooling alone is inconceivable and even if it is implemented, this concept is inefficient. Elaborating on his allegations, Gintis explains that in order to remedy the shortcomings of American education one has to be able to assess properly all the dynamics acting upon this process. Here again, according to Gintis, we have a clear implication that Illich did not understand the complex makings of the American educational system.

<sup>31</sup>*Idem.*, p. 17.

Furthermore, Gintis expands on his theory that a drastic change in the educational system could happen only if the following steps are observed:

1) An assessment has to be made regarding the inconsistencies existing in the economic life of society and their influence over the educational system.

2) A climate of awareness has to be fostered among people about the inconsistencies existing in society in order to prevent manipulation of the masses by the capitalist rulers.

3) A revolutionary movement has to be created in order to reform the present educational system, a movement which has to have its roots of understanding in the contradictions prevailing in the capitalist society.<sup>32</sup>

In Gintis' opinion, these steps represent the basis of an immediate strategy required in order to implement effective educational reform. In other words, Illich's theory of deschooling is not effective if it is confined to the school system alone.

Furthermore, Gintis states that the actual contradictions in society are due to:

a) The black people being moved to large urban concentrations from independent rural areas in a different wage labor system.

<sup>32</sup>*Idem.*, p. 17.

b) The young people with aspirations towards entrepreneurial endeavors, the highly educated white collar youngsters and the professional and technical school graduates confronted with the extinction of opportunities for individual initiative, the standardization of production and the banalization of work in factories.

c) The women being victimized and segregated upon a system which is geared towards achievement and industrial output only.

Moreover, Gintis agrees that his theory is schematic and that the matter has to be investigated further in order to shape up an efficient program of school reform. In his opinion, the only criterion for an effective strategy is formulated by the question: Is this strategy leading to a transitional society?

Returning to Illich's theory of deschooling, Gintis argues that if implemented, this concept will eventually provoke social chaos, but it will fall short of generating a new equitable social system.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, it will not cure the real cause of malaise in society. Furthermore, Gintis thinks that this argument over the efficiency of the deschooling concept is futile because this process will never take place. Schools are an essential link in the capitalist social process, according to Gintis, who refutes on this basis Illich's argument that individuals are responsible for and can implement a deschooling programme. Gintis thinks that schools represent the only avenue

<sup>33</sup>Gintis, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

leading to social well-being, therefore a major revolt against schools will never happen.

Following the same line of thought, Gintis rejects Illich's idea that schools are not organized against attacks and can be liberated without blood being spilled. "A frontal attack on institutionalized education would not necessarily spill over to attacks on other major institutions",<sup>34</sup> says Gintis. Hence, he declares that Illich's idea is "no more than whistling in the dark".<sup>35</sup>

Ending his argument, H. Gintis explains that, in his opinion, what has to be done in this case is exactly the contrary of what Illich advocates. In other words, Gintis believes that in order to liberate the schools, the students should be encouraged to struggle for more power from their teachers and the teachers should be encouraged to ask for more power towards the administration of the school. This process may prove to be beneficial for all parties involved because it trains the participants for further struggle in society.

<sup>34</sup> *Idem.*, p. 17.

<sup>35</sup> *Idem.*, p. 17.

## b) Carl Hedman's commentary

Among those agreeing with Illich is Carl G. Hedman. In his article, "The Deschooling Controversy Revisited: A defense of Illich's participatory socialism",<sup>36</sup> Hedman takes a position for Illich, against what he characterizes as a Marxist critique by Gintis.

Carl Hedman points out that Ivan Illich does not accept the basic economic institutions of capitalism, as Gintis pretends, but has his misgivings about hierarchical socialism. Moreover, says Hedman, Illich, in Tools for Conviviality, develops a critique of both systems, capitalism and hierarchical socialism alike. Therefore, Hedman argues, Illich does not accept the basic capitalist institutions, as Gintis asserts. On the contrary, Hedman continues, Illich calls for new economic arrangements, and for changing the existing social structures. Along the same line of thought, Hedman explains that Illich calls for a real worker democracy, a participatory socialism in the true sense and that explains his qualms about a hierarchical socialism. Moreover, Hedman finds Gintis' assertion unfounded that Illich naively envisages a presocial human nature, which will take over once the forces of oppression are removed. What Illich really advocates is a socialization mechanism developed by the people in a participatory fashion, without being imposed by a radical élite.

Continuing his argument, Hedman argues that Illich's deschooling idea takes a normative connotation when it is presented as a "key to

<sup>36</sup> Hedman, Carl G., *The Deschooling Society Revisited: A Defense of Illich's Participatory Socialism*, Educational Theory 29, N.2 (Spring, 1979).

human liberation". Moreover, according to Hedman, Illich presents the changing of actual structures as a precondition to deschooling. As a result, Hedman considers Gintis' critique as redundant because in the final analysis Illich says the same thing as Gintis, only he says it in a different way.

In support of his defense of Illich, Hedman mentions the fact that Illich warns those who are seeking a working alternative for schools that substantial progress should be made in the normative sense of deschooling before any change in the school system is attempted. Otherwise, says Hedman, more vulgar learning may result, intended for immediate utility or eventually prestige. Contrary to Gintis, Hedman infers from Illich's writings that Illich calls for a total change in society and his educational theory is only a part of the complex attack against it. Moreover, Hedman thinks that Illich attacks the school system because he believes that this is the place to start.

In Hedman's opinion, Illich is very careful not to be labelled as a "socialist", or "capitalist". Illich, according to Hedman, just seeks an equitable social order and considers that deschooling society is a start in that direction. Moreover, Hedman points out that while Gintis criticizes Illich from the Marxist point of view, which favors state socialism, Illich leans towards a participatory socialism, more in line with left-wing anarchists like Peter Kropotkin and Emma Goldman. Kropotkin and Goldman, says Hedman, are disappointed with the outcome of the Russian revolution, which failed in their opinion

because of the state idea. Instead of having a libertarian spirit which permeates all activities in society, a fanatical government modified the principles of Marxism, supporting the principle of the state controlling society. In this respect, Goldman says that:

*"It is only when the libertarian spirit permeates the economic organizations of the workers, that the manifold creative activity emerges, workers can manifest themselves, and the revolution is safeguarded and defended."*<sup>37</sup>

This is more in line with Illich's thoughts in social philosophy.

The second important charge of Gintis against Illich is that the latter envisages a good nature of the humans that will take over, once the oppressive powers are removed. Hedman reasserts that Illich does not "naively" trust good human nature, but he objects to a social system imposed by a ruling élite. According to Illich, whether this élite may well be capitalist, technocratic or state socialist, the result will be the same. Therefore, Hedman states that Illich means to give the controls of society to the people in order to avoid a situation where the revolution becomes an institution.

As for the Cuban educational experience, Hedman defends Illich on the grounds that he is misunderstood by Gintis. Illich sees the Cuban schooling system as a failure, says Hedman, because the mechanism of the hidden curriculum exists also in Cuban schools. This hidden curriculum contributes to the production of a "new Fidelista", but

<sup>37</sup>Goldman, Emma, My Further Disillusionment in Russia, Garden City: Doubleday (1972), pp. 345-346.



nevertheless it illustrates Illich's idea of the schools manipulating the students.

As a conclusion, Hedman postulates that Illich is not understood by Gintis, who does not realize that they both agree upon the same principles in different ways. The only difference between Illich and Gintis, says Hedman, is that Illich does not present his critique of society and the school system in a standard Marxist fashion.

c) Brian Birchall's commentary

Brian Birchall is another important critic of Illich. In "Some Misconceptions in Ivan Illich",<sup>38</sup> Birchall argues that the alleged contradiction between the institution of schooling and education is a misconception that can be found in Rousseau's "Emile"; this implies that Illich is influenced by the French thinker. Moreover, Birchall argues that schools are not as manipulative and opposed to education as Illich seems to believe. In regard to the anti-institutional stand taken by Illich, Birchall's perception is that Illich does not object to all institutions involved in the educational process because he proposes, as an alternative, the learning web which is technically an institution. Therefore Birchall deduces that Illich is opposed only to institutions of a certain character. Moreover, addressing himself to the problem of manipulation of the students by the schools, Birchall maintains that the institutional features of the school are not manipulative. According to Birchall, what makes the school

<sup>38</sup> Birchall, Brian, *Some Misconceptions in Ivan Illich, Educational Theory*, V.24:4 (Fall, 1974).

manipulative is the social movement that institutes these schools, not the school features.

The first argument in Birchall's article deals with compulsory attendance. According to Illich, this is one of the evils of modern education because it is opposed to human freedom. At this point, Birchall debates Illich's conception of freedom which means, according to Illich: "To be free from all constraints". Birchall refutes this idea on the grounds that, according to some psychologists, including Sigmund Freud, many human activities are governed by compulsive rationalization. Therefore, Illich's concept of freedom means unrestrained compulsiveness. Consequently, in Birchall's view, Illich confuses freedom with free compulsiveness. This confusion invalidates, according to Birchall, Illich's theory of compulsory attendance by being incompatible with the concept of individual freedom. As a conclusion, Brian Birchall asserts that the school does not impinge upon students' freedom, as Illich maintains. On the contrary, Birchall argues that: "By making attendance compulsory, the educational authority provides the opportunity for the child to be placed in circumstances other than his home life."<sup>39</sup> This freedom from the narrowness of the "home mentality" gives to the child the opportunity to see life from a different perspective. Moreover, compulsory attendance, according to Birchall, frees the child from the particular social class to which he belongs. Compulsory attendance allows the child to socialize with other children, regardless of non-educational

<sup>39</sup>*Idem.*, p. 416.

criteria such as wealth, race, social status, etc.

By the same token, Birchall claims that by attending "learning webs", the student will lose the advantages of the compulsory attendance in school. Another disadvantage of the free attendance of learning webs is that some children may not be able to make an informed decision in this respect. In this case, these children may attend some "dubious authority" classes, advertised through Illich's learning webs, and the results can be only detrimental for the student. Illich, according to Birchall, does not seem aware of the importance of the compulsory attendance in school. Regarding the hidden curriculum, Birchall agrees with Illich that the schools are much more effective in teaching the so-called "hidden curriculum" than the overt curriculum. Moreover, Brian Birchall argues that the hidden curriculum, which is unavoidable in a school situation, is not necessarily detrimental to education. Only a special kind of hidden curriculum, says Birchall, may be deleterious to the process of learning.<sup>40</sup>

Furthermore, Birchall disagrees with Illich's claim concerning the "hierarchy through certification" allegedly established by the school system. According to Birchall, Illich claims that, as part of the hidden curriculum, certification promotes a hierarchy in society, which is discriminatory and unjust. He argues that segregation in education should be based on intellectual status, without compromising the ideals of democracy because not everybody is equal with respect to learning. Otherwise, in order to have a true democracy, says Birchall, the

<sup>40</sup>*Idem.*, p. 418.

educators will have to lower school standards to the level of the less able student.

Another issue debated by Birchall over Illich's theory is the matter of student participation. Illich pretends, says Birchall, that "what appears as learning is mere instruction -- the passive acceptance by the student of whatever the teacher says".<sup>41</sup> Birchall discusses this point by explaining that, in his opinion, the student in class accepts the teacher's presentation at face value due to the obvious difference in knowledge. The information imparted by the teacher is assimilated by the student, who processes it through his own probing assessment. Furthermore, Birchall maintains that the student is actively involved by the very fact that he gradually sorts in his mind the provided information into a coherent body of knowledge. Even if the teacher transmits the information, the digesting process should be done individually by every student. Therefore, the students are not passive recipients, as Illich pretends, but active participants, maintains Birchall.

With regard to the overt curriculum, Birchall dismisses Illich's claim that "not everyone wants to learn the same thing".<sup>42</sup> This claim is not valid according to Birchall on the grounds that: "education is a distinctive exercise of mind, acquired through exercising one's mind upon specific subjects and acquiring items of knowledge that develop one's capacity to acquire items of knowledge".<sup>43</sup> According to Birchall, Illich's assumption that education is exercising one's mind upon any

<sup>41</sup>*Idem.*, p. 419.

<sup>42</sup>*Idem.*, p. 420.

<sup>43</sup>*Idem.*, p. 420.

subject area and acquiring any items of knowledge is invalid because Birchall believes that some knowledge is more relevant to the teaching process than knowledge acquired according to one's whim. In Birchall's opinion, the fact that some students do not wish to learn some of the items dispensed by the teacher denotes only that these students refuse to be educated. Furthermore, in the debate over curriculum, Illich presents an overwhelming objection, namely the question of interest. Birchall declares Illich's theory of interest superficial and very feeble with regard to the psychological aspect. Birchall proceeds with his own theory of interest, stating that a student may develop interest in the very process of learning. The fact that the student is initially not interested does not necessarily mean that the student will not learn. Moreover, there may be external factors which may contribute to his lack of interest, like an unhappy home life. The problem of the right time to learn as well as the question of interest is debated by Birchall along the following lines:

a) A child cannot decide if he should learn or not and what he should learn because he does not have the maturity nor the necessary comprehension entailed by such a decision.

b) Contrary to what Illich believes, the interest may come after the student is engaged in the process of learning, due to the development of his knowledge and also due to the development of his capacity to learn.<sup>44</sup> Asserting that in young students the finding of

<sup>44</sup>*Idem.*, p. 421.

objects of interest comes mainly through environmental influence, Birchall concludes his argument with the statement that: "It is not exercising educational responsibility to refrain from any attempt to influence the child with educational interests or objects".<sup>45</sup>

Pursuing further the feature of interest in education, Birchall asserts that Illich believes that education should involve interest in a certain subject. Furthermore, Birchall elaborates on the notion of interest by explaining that interest in a certain matter is necessary for education, but not sufficient. Moreover he declares that interest may lead to the attainment of expertise in a particular field, but it should not be regarded as a mastery of that subject.

On the same topic of interest, Birchall mentions that the concept of critical inquiry, which is suggested by Illich instead of a fixed curriculum, is tantamount to a get-together with students who ask questions, which is an exercise without real meaning. Elaborating further on this matter of critical inquiry, Birchall insists that in order to develop a system which processes efficiently the available information, one needs first to acquire a certain amount of knowledge. This process, which is called by Birchall "critical inquiry", requires a continuous assessment of the acquired knowledge leading eventually to more knowledge being assimilated if it is to be an educational process. Moreover, he believes that this development of critical inquiry is called education and calls for a fixed curriculum in order to equip the student's mind with the necessary elements leading to a balanced

<sup>45</sup> *Idem.*, p. 421.

capacity of judgment. Therefore, says Birchall, how can the fixed curriculum be opposed to education, as Illich maintains, when it is the actual means of becoming educated. Furthermore, Birchall mentions the fact that several alternative definitions of education are offered and the word education embraces different meanings for different people.

Birchall's idea of education appears to be: "Education is a permanent capacity or set of attitudes, a way of living or thinking, a way of being interested, not an unrelated host of items of knowledge stored away in the *tabula rasa*".<sup>46</sup> Many other theories of education are considered by Birchall as being "relativistic". One of those theories is that education is whatever one wants to do or become. According to Birchall, this definition is relativistic, because a person can become knowledgeable in a specific field without being able to deal intellectually with general issues. According to Birchall, this fact contradicts directly the concept of critical inquiry. Another theory mentioned by Birchall as relativistic is the theory that: "education is whatever thinking fits in with a given society, or is in accordance with that society's character".<sup>47</sup>

In order to illustrate his point, Birchall assumes, as an experiment, that one lives in a society which is absolutely pragmatic. In this kind of society, one can "fit" perfectly by adopting the mentality of that society, but that does not guarantee at all that this person can be considered as educated. Therefore, Birchall concludes the argument by asserting that only "a non-relativistic definition of

<sup>46</sup>*Idem.*, p. 422.

<sup>47</sup>*Idem.*, p. 424.

education" can serve the purpose. Moreover, Birchall declares that Illich's theory may seem as if it carries a fair amount of credibility. Nonetheless, upon stricter examination Illich's theory presents certain weaknesses, such as specifically undocumented affirmations as well as erroneous ideas about democracy, freedom and education. Birchall agrees with Jacques Barzoun who, in "The House of Intellect", states that these views go with the philanthropic or missionary attitude. Finally, Birchall ends his critique with the following statement: "Illich is neither a radical nor a deep thinker. Essentially he is a moralist who, in many instances, lets his concern get in the way of his view of the facts."<sup>48</sup>

d) Michael Macklin's commentary

Macklin is one educator who does not agree with Birchall in his critique of Illich's theories. In his article "Those misconceptions are not Illich's",<sup>49</sup> Macklin begins by declaring that he is not in complete agreement with Illich's position. Nevertheless, Macklin states that Illich's theory has its merits and it presents a valuable addition to the current educational debate regarding this subject. Moreover, Macklin asserts that Birchall's argument fails to grasp the reality of contemporary schools, which is a reality fully understood by Illich.

Macklin mentions that Birchall does not specifically attack Illich's main claim that schools are basically manipulative or that

<sup>48</sup> *Idem.*, p. 414.

<sup>49</sup> Macklin, Michael, *Those Misconceptions Are Not Illich's*, Educational Theory, V.25:3 (Summer, 1975).



they have achieved a monopoly in their realm, and they turn their handlers into people incapable of changing the schools. Macklin<sup>50</sup> instead addresses himself to one of Birchall's arguments which suggests that Illich operates under the idea that education does not take place if it fosters an atmosphere of constraint. Therefore Birchall seems to believe that Illich advocates a system of education totally free from any constraints. Macklin insists that Illich criticizes only some forms of constraint, but recognizes that there is a need for limits. According to Macklin, Illich is against these kinds of constraints which are opposed to education, specifically when students are forced to learn items of no concern for them whatsoever. Moreover, it seems to Macklin that Birchall finds that only attendance is compulsory in school. In this respect, and probably rightly so, Macklin points out that Illich is fighting the obligatory curriculum. For Illich, imposing a certain curriculum means impinging upon the student's freedom. Furthermore, Macklin maintains that Illich is right when he blames a system which ignores the eventual development of people if it cannot be attained through the regular channels of the school. Continuing his argument, Macklin explains that, in his opinion, the educational system can only present the opportunity to learn to the child, without determining at what point in time and what will be learned. Along this line of thought, Macklin states that he would like to demand that Birchall establish parameters specifying what has to be learned and when, so that it can be assessed how valid his claim is.

<sup>50</sup>*Idem.*, p. 323.

Moreover, Macklin explains that Illich does not dispute the value of learning per se, as Birchall pretends.<sup>51</sup> He is just concerned with ethical considerations such as the child being forced to learn items which are not of interest to him. Macklin agrees with Illich that the school has to provide for the student the necessary conditions required by the learning process, instead of imposing a certain set of elements to be learned. In this case, Macklin agrees with Illich that the school fails to live up to public expectation. Birchall's critique of Illich is again contradicted by Macklin when he asserts that school discriminates among its students. Birchall maintains that the school rightly discriminates between the students on the basis of acquired knowledge. In Birchall's mind, those who fail to attain a certain level of knowledge are solely responsible for their failure in school. Macklin argues, agreeing with Illich, that the selection in school is made through a system of assessment which is geared to determine the amount of knowledge learned from the school curriculum. According to Illich and Macklin, this system of evaluation has enormous consequences in the sense that it has an impact upon the individual's role in society for the rest of his natural life.

Stating that the grading system is not infallible due to its lack of flexibility, Macklin points out that the school exams are seeking to find out how much of the curriculum taught is assimilated by the student, instead of how much the student really knows. Therefore the selection made by the school is not totally valid, but nonetheless it

<sup>51</sup> *Idem.*, p. 325.

contributes to bolster the enormous socioeconomic range which exists in our society. These differences grow even further, says Macklin, because the wealthy people can provide their offspring with better living conditions as well as better stimuli such as films, plays, trips, books, and so on. Birchall, by supporting the ideology of merit, does not take these elements into consideration. Therefore, in this respect, Macklin believes that Birchall's critique of Illich is invalid.

Another point advanced by Birchall in his critique is that, "Illich seems to be operating on the assumption that education is exercising one's mind upon any subject and acquiring any items of knowledge".<sup>52</sup> Macklin contradicts this assertion of Birchall's stating that Illich alleges that it is wrong to view education as the acquiring of items of knowledge. Furthermore, Macklin explains that Illich, in support of his theory, presents an analogy, called by him "the supplier consumer analogy". Illich explains his analogy as follows: The supplier teacher delivers a prepackaged knowledge and the student consumer learns to react to such knowledge rather than the reality from which this knowledge has been extracted. Furthermore, in Macklin's opinion Birchall considers education as a commodity which can be used on the market in exchange for money or other goods. Macklin states that, contrary to Birchall, Illich considers knowledge as a commodity only when the said knowledge is used for a specific institutional purpose and is the product of an institutional corpora-

<sup>52</sup>Birchall, *op. cit.*, p. 414.

tion. Thus, in Illich's opinion, the school is guilty of producing knowledge which may be used as a commodity. Macklin points out that Illich avows the value of knowledge per se. Moreover, says Macklin, Illich's quarrel with the school is that the school system is mainly concerned to provide that kind of knowledge which can be used by the student as a commodity, rather than pure knowledge. This changes completely the perspective of education, Illich maintains. Along the same line of thought, Illich contends that this kind of education reinforces the consumer society and provides a rationale for it. Therefore, says Macklin, "Illich does not operate under the assumption attributed to him by Birchall".<sup>53</sup>

Macklin states that Birchall attributes to Illich the theory that education is confined to a certain curriculum. On the contrary, states Macklin, Illich believes that the school's interests should not be rigid for he is concerned with the technological values important to the educational process. By technological values, Illich understands the values pertaining to material abundance. Moreover, in Illich's concept, asserts Macklin, the school is subservient to the social class which benefits the most from this materialistic orientation. Furthermore, as a consequence of this dependence, the school constantly promotes a system whereby the privileged group prospers at the expense of other segments of society. In order to alter this state of affairs, the school has to undertake a drastic change in its orientation.

<sup>53</sup>Macklin, *op. cit.*, p. 328.

However, due to its ancillary position vis-a-vis the ruling group, it cannot initiate nor support such a change. The above theory is ascribed by Macklin to Illich as a proof that Birchall is wrong in his critique. Macklin concludes that the misconceptions in Illich's theory mentioned by Birchall, are in fact Birchall's own misconceptions. In Macklin's own words: "The misconceptions Birchall attributes to Illich are, in reality, Birchall's own".<sup>54</sup>

e) Ignatio L. Gotz's commentary

Ignatio L. Gotz is another important critic of Ivan Illich and his theories. Illich's position in the educational field is considered by Gotz as being a "radical trend". Moreover, Gotz states that Illich's aim to eradicate the schools on the grounds that they are totally inadequate, sounds foolish to many Americans. Gotz believes that some criticism aimed at Illich is extremely superficial, although he mentions that some of this criticism is worth considering.

In his article "On man and his schooling",<sup>55</sup> Gotz begins by elaborating the role of the social institution. In this respect, he states that in the pursuit of a social need, society organizes these structures called institutions. Moreover, the changing conditions in society require alterations in the above-mentioned institutions, in order to pursue these in a more adequate and efficient manner. These necessary changes, says Gotz, can be done within the confines of these institutions, without eradicating them completely. Therefore,

<sup>54</sup>  
idem., p. 329.

<sup>55</sup>  
Gotz, Ignacio L., *On Man and his Schooling*, Educational Theory, V.24:1 (Winter, 1974).

according to Gotz there are two methods of change in society: one, advocated by Gotz, which consists in making changes within the existing structures, and another method sustained by Illich, which calls for the total elimination of these structures, once they are believed to outlive their purpose. Illich's method is called "anti-institutionalism" by Gotz who, in turn, explains that Illich proposes other structures to replace the existing ones. Therefore, at first sight Illich contradicts himself with his "anti-institutionalist" theory. Gotz does not believe that Illich contradicts himself because the anti-institutionalists see these institutions only as means used in order to liberate man. Consequently, one can use whatever means or changes seem necessary in order to arrive at the ultimate goal.<sup>56</sup>

Gotz continues his examination of Illich's argument by discussing the radicalism of the deschooling movement. In this respect, Ignatio Gotz argues that since some schools are good they should not be eliminated. Moreover, the alleged school abuses are not taking place to the extent alleged by Illich. The main evil of schools, claims Illich, is the hidden curriculum. Therefore, according to Illich we should do away with the schools in order to eradicate the hidden curriculum. Gotz explains that in Illich's theory, the school is evil because it alienates man from his free nature. Consequently, the better the school, the greater the evil. This idea of Illich is presented by Gotz and other thinkers as "the pedagogic paradox" of Illich. Gotz addresses himself to some objections raised against this

<sup>56</sup> *Idem.*, p. 87.

concept by other people. Some of the thinkers in education, says Gotz, pretend that to deschool society is too much of an undertaking and that the proposed alternative is not viable. Gotz refutes these objections on the grounds that it is not necessary to foresee the consequences of such action to the last detail. The fine alterations can be done "ad hoc" in order to meet the difficulties which may arise. Moreover, Gotz pretends that this critique against deschooling proves that the school does a very good job in indoctrinating the students, that it is the only possible dispenser of education. In the final analysis, this argument of feasibility is considered by Gotz as a reformist theory which can be supported only by people who believe in the sacrosanctness of the social institutions. Gotz also mentions Carl Bereiter's idea that Illich's proposal is unrealistic because there are not enough teachers trained to deal with a deschooled society. In his opinion, Gotz believes that Bereiter's argument about teachers has some merit, but he considers it as a challenge which can be eventually met by the people in the educational field.

Gotz agrees with C. Bereiter and T.F. Green about the fact that we set highly humanistic goals for our schools, while assessing their efficiency with very materialistic standards.<sup>57</sup> The actual deplorable situation in education is viewed by Gotz as providing an incentive to all the people of good will to work towards Illich's ideal of promoting a more humane form of education. Birchall's accusation that Illich is promoting élitism as a by-product of deschooling is rebutted by Gotz in

<sup>57</sup> *Idem.*, p. 91.

the sense that even if we deschool, that does not mean we have to do away with the teachers. The objection against deschooling is that the privileged classes have an advantage in a deschooled situation because they can provide their children with tutors and also teach these children through expensive, private schools.<sup>58</sup>

Gotz ends his rebuttal of Birchall's arguments against Illich, and turns to the Marxist attack on deschooling, especially that of Gintis. According to Gotz, Gintis maintains that since schools are a reflection of the socioeconomic structure, by eradicating them, as Illich advocates, it would mean addressing the effect and not the root problem or the cause, which is the very socioeconomic structure itself. In Gintis' opinion, the socioeconomic structure should be changed, and then, as a result, the schools will also change. Gotz believes that Gintis is wrong in his allegation, because the schools today are also part of the socioeconomic structure and by attacking the schools we are attacking only a part of the system. Moreover, the teachers are part of the social mass, fighting like every other worker for their salaries and better working conditions, as well as for their students who can be considered a part of the proletariat. Therefore, Gotz disagrees with Gintis on the grounds that Illich, by attacking the schools, is dealing with the cause, not with the effect, as alleged.

Continuing his analysis, Gotz notices that, in his argument, Gintis misses an important point. The missed point is Gintis' failure to appreciate the fact that Illich does not condemn the schools for

<sup>58</sup>*Idem.*, p. 92.



being manipulative. Illich's quarrel with the schools is that, through manipulation they alienate man from his freedom, therefore preventing him from reaching his full potential.

Gotz explains that the anti-institutionalist position is not so much opposed to institutions as much as it is in favor of man. Moreover, Gotz agrees with Illich that any schooling institution conveys to the student more than what is described in the official curriculum. Even if the hidden curriculum does not occur as a consciously planned consequence, it takes place just the same. Gotz accepts the inevitable result of the hidden curriculum but questions whether this hidden curriculum is necessarily wicked, as Illich maintains.<sup>59</sup> Illich's argument for deschooling is presented by Gotz in a dialectical way, as follows:

1) It is established that schools inevitably generate a hidden curriculum as a by-product of the educational process.

2) This hidden curriculum is necessarily evil because it contradicts the very essence of man as being perfectible.

3) Because the school cannot function without producing this hidden curriculum, the school should be abolished in order to eradicate this unwanted result.

For Gotz, Illich's concept of "paidea" illustrates the continuous effort of man to enhance his humanity. In order to arrive at a certain

<sup>59</sup>*Idem.*, p. 95.

level of fulfillment, man has to transcend the previous level. Therefore, by subtly conveying to the students that it is not transcendable, the school opposes man's perfectibility. Gotz, as well as Illich, infers that schools are actually in the way of man's education, because they are opposed to the individual's growth to his full potential. In Illich's own words: "We should give each one of us an environment in which we can celebrate our potential and discover the way into a more humane world".<sup>60</sup>

In conclusion, Gotz recognizes that by arguing on the basis of man's perfectibility, one exposes himself to the counter-argument that any institution replacing the existing one will end up by doing the same thing, because it is the very nature of any structure to be alienating. Moreover, Gotz supports Illich when he maintains that he is not seeking absolute perfection. He is just attempting to achieve an improvement in the actual situation, in line with a theory of man's perfectibility.

<sup>60</sup>

Illich, Ivan, Celebration of Awareness, p. 15.

## f) Francis Schrag's commentary

Francis Schrag participates in the deschooling debate without completely disagreeing with Ignacio Gotz. F. Schrag argues that the problem in hand is not about having or not having structures. The actual question is, what kind of structures are there? Furthermore, in his article, "Reply to Gotz and Deschooling",<sup>61</sup> Schrag argues that the family is a structure as well as the supermarket, but nobody even thinks to do away with them. Also, Illich's idea that schools promote elitism by supporting a caste society is disputed by Schrag. In this respect, Schrag concedes that institutions have a self-perpetuating tendency, but he argues that in countries like Peru, where schools are barely existent, the caste system is just as strong as in modern America. "Therefore, the school is not the main culprit", Schrag concludes.

Another point raised by Schrag is that structures are necessary for human development. The reformist believes in them, while the anti-institutionalist only uses them for his own end which is the development of man. Moreover, with regard to Gotz's belief that schools are only means in the process of human growth, it is not clear to what extent Schrag would agree to either abolish or to reform them. In this respect, Francis Schrag thinks that the move to reconstruct the educational system depends on the assessment of the positive contribution of the school in any society weighed against any evil effects it may engender.

<sup>61</sup> Schrag, Francis, Reply to Gotz on Deschooling, Educational Theory, V.24:4 (Fall, 1974).

In conclusion, Schrag brings up the question which naturally arises about the deschoolers, how come that the anti-institutionalist is usually highly educated and sometimes is even associated with universities? The subsequent question deriving from the initial one is: how can an individual exposed for so long a time to the hidden curriculum still have a neutral perspective in this regard? Schrag presents another interesting point, that the deschoolers ignore the fact that schools exist in every culture, irrespective of differences in the way of life or social setting. Moreover, this institution of schooling has survived all kinds of adversities throughout the years, a fact which in itself is a proof of its viability.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>62</sup>  
*Idem.*, p. 411.

## CHAPTER V. AN ANALYSIS OF AND REACTION TO IVAN ILLICH AND HIS COMMENTATORS

Illich has been criticized by so many in so many ways that it is hard to arrive at a coherent picture of a general criticism of his philosophy. My original intention, stated as the aim of this thesis, was to try to shed some light on the "Illich controversy". Therefore, I will offer my personal assessment of some of the critiques, while aspiring to clarify a few elements in this polemic.

### a) On Herbert Gintis' commentary<sup>63</sup>

Gintis begins his critique by prizing Illich's work as an attempt to discover the roots of "decay", as he calls it, of the advanced industrial societies. He blames Illich for not considering the malaise of society in depth, and for not trying to unveil the roots of this illness. In other words, Gintis thinks that Illich falls short of assessing the social situation as a whole. In my opinion, Illich addresses himself to a definite weakness in society, namely the quality of contemporary education. Even if he goes so far as to advocate the eradication of schools, he does not encompass in his radical concept the whole spectrum of the social establishment. It seems to me that Illich is not a radical in the true sense of the word; he is just a theoretician who tries to diagnose the troubles in education and also tries to find a cure for them. Gintis is partly right when he claims

<sup>63</sup> Gintis, Herbert, *Towards A Political Economy of Education: A Radical Critique of Ivan Illich's Deschooling Society*.

that Illich wrongly blames the affliction of society on the need to reproduce alienated patterns of consumption. In my opinion, Illich especially at the beginning analyzed America with his inherent European frame of reference. Coming to a new world, he had to interpret a multitude of stimuli which sometimes were poorly decoded by him. Illich, as a European immigrant, was unaccustomed to the American phenomenon of consumption. Therefore, since he was not able to integrate this new element into his social background, Illich considered consumerism as the great evil of society. Hence, he blamed the malfunction of society on this habit of consumption. Even if it is true that certain elements in American society use consumption for their own advantage, nevertheless, as Gintis stated, they merely capitalize upon it.

Gintis' claim that Illich's theory is operating in a vacuum because it is not part of a total process of reconstruction is incorrect. Illich's theory provides us with a transcendent vehicle in order to explore all the pros and cons of the social and educational situation. By pushing his exploration of the state of education to the extreme, Illich presents us with a whole range of possibilities. It is up to the thinkers in education to assess the validity of Illich's claims and to find a viable remedy and workable alternative for the problems.

Gintis is correct when he says that in our western society the accumulation of capital and growth of marketable services prevail over the healthy development of society. But, on the other hand, we

have witnessed what the Communist régimes have done for their people. In the light of the latest political events, an honest person cannot do otherwise than concede that in China, the U.S.S.R., East Germany, Czechoslovakia, etc., those political régimes are nothing but a lamentable failure. Gintis blames Illich for locating the source of social imbalance in the manipulative behavior of corporate bureaucracies. According to Gintis, the basic capitalist institutions should be changed. Personally, I would challenge Gintis to provide us with a viable alternative to these institutions.

Illich believes that the source of consumer consciousness lies in the manipulative socialization of the individuals by different agencies subservient to the big corporations. Gintis maintains that Illich is wrong because these agencies are merely reconfirming the individuals in their induced values, but I think that both of them fail to consider the realities of our modern society. In order to be competitive and to be able to produce goods affordable by the masses, the manufacturer is forced to follow a certain pattern of production. This special pattern results inevitably in alienating the worker from the product. Therefore, the worker seeks other forms of gratification and this leads to consumerism.

Illich keeps thinking of the Middle Ages, when there was no manufacturing process and every craftsman took pride in his skills. Gintis does not know or does not want to admit that nowadays workers in the U.S.S.R. are just as alienated from the product as their American

1 counterpart. Both Illich and Gintis should understand that nobody can afford to go back to the old days of production and be successful. In this regard Gintis speculates about a system where the people will participate democratically in all forms of social outcomes, including production in factories. Personally, I would like to see such a system being implemented but so far, since the Greeks invented democracy, it has never happened. Probably this is wishful thinking on Gintis' part, but because of human nature I don't think that a true democracy will ever exist.

In order to generate a situation where production is unalienated, Gintis envisages a radical change of the basic process. By the same token, he believes that Illich agrees with him by virtue of his deschooling theory. In this respect, I believe that Gintis appropriates Illich's theory to help his own view of society. Illich does not claim that the social system should be abolished, he just tries to find a workable alternative to some flaws in the system. The cure proposed by Illich is very far from the Marxist ideal.

Moreover, in my opinion, Gintis overextended his statement by including Illich in the Marxist outlook. Illich states that service agencies (including schools) fail because they are psychologically addictive. Gintis proposes that public services do not fail and that expansion is an integral part of the normal operation of social institutions. Furthermore these agencies aggravate the social problems, and therefore they have to expand even more. In my opinion, the institutions in



question do not fail at all, but their problem lies in the fact that changes occur very rapidly on the social scene. The said institutions cannot cope with these rapid changes. Therefore, in many cases, they provide a very questionable service. Moreover, all institutions have a built-in need to grow because they are trying to follow the development of society. Of course, this expansion should be under some sort of control or it takes on exaggerated proportions.

With regard to the problem of consumption, it is my belief that Illich, as well as Gintis, fail to see the reality. In my opinion, the truth is that societal institutions including schools are a reflection of contemporary society. Hence, both Illich and Gintis are looking at the wrong end of the problem. The industrial revolution initiated the process of goods being produced in bulk and later on with the advent of organized mass production this process gathered momentum. A consequence of these new changes is that the worker became totally alienated from the product. Subsequently the working people shifted their values towards the ability of producing money in order to accumulate and exhibit as many goods as possible. The ownership of the said goods was a proof of success in life and carried with it as a side effect, an induced respect from one's peers and the public in general. Therefore, the phenomenon of mass-consumption appears as a logical consequence of mass-production. Moreover, if the process stops, the economic cycle would break with catastrophic results for the people participating in that system.

Illich's assertion that the problem of contemporary society is the psychological impotence of the individual due to "addictiveness" is contradicted by Gintis. The solution to "anti-addictiveness" offered by Illich is not effective when applied to contemporary society. It is not effective because the individuals try to accommodate the society they live in, as they turn into docile creatures according to Gintis' view. In this respect, I think that people living in society cannot reach their full potential due to the very fact that individuals have to respect some restraints imposed by that very society. In other words, we cannot blame a society for imposing certain requirements on its constituents. Living in society requires some compromises and these concessions might constitute a hindrance to the fulfillment of the individual. Living as a recluse might lead to spiritual growth and self-realization, but it has as an obvious prerequisite the renunciation of a comfortable life. In these days not many people are prepared to make such a sacrifice. Therefore many individuals choose to live in society, making the best of their lives. Furthermore, this "addictiveness" is part of human nature, and very few humans go through life without trying to amass earthly belongings. It has been proven time and time again that the human species has as one of its characteristics the drive to gather as many goods as possible. There are many examples in literature and history to this effect, and I would say that this drive is not confined only to humans. Many animals, e.g. squirrels, dogs, birds and cats hoard objects of value for themselves.

One of Gintis' major critiques of Illich is in regard to the "addictiveness" of work. Illich maintains that work is not addictive; therefore it is not a threat to human freedom. On the other hand, Gintis states that work is addictive in a broad sense because it establishes the position of the individual in society. Personally, I believe that work provides the individual with a needed structure. This structure gives humans a purpose and meaning in life, meanwhile offering to the individual a chance to demonstrate his creativity and ability. The structure supplied by work is beneficial in many aspects. Moreover, the human body profits from the habit of waking up at a certain time, eating regularly, and if not exercising at least moving around, as any kind of work requires from a person. Furthermore, the exercise of the mind, necessary in any field of work cannot do any harm. On the contrary, it helps the mind to develop even further. In many types of work one can demonstrate his ability, sometimes challenging his peers, silently or otherwise, to match his or her performance. Also, one of the most rewarding aspects of work is the function of being the provider in the family. Lastly, work accords a certain identity to a person asserting his/her place in society. Except for the work done in some industrial situations, many workers develop in their task, by exhibiting their capabilities and fulfilling in this way their needs for self-realization. One cannot refrain from thinking that Illich as well as Gintis probably never worked manually. Otherwise they would never arrive at these conclusions.

Gintis also makes the very interesting assertion that there is no such thing as human nature, which Illich maintains, exists prior to social interaction. I would maintain that there is a human nature prior to social contact because the process of socialization can only change some human attitudes and eventually some convictions, but the basic human nature can hardly be changed. Moreover, it seems to me that it is true that Illich's Epithemean and Promethean man exist in every one of us, but in most cases one of the two usually predominates in our attitudes and actions. As an example, during a war, a man changes his outlook on life and eventually kills his fellow man. As soon as this special condition ends, the human usually becomes again a peaceful creature and reverts to his original human nature.

In the matter of developing technology, Gintis and Illich agree that people might be either oppressed or liberated by this process. Nevertheless, Gintis thinks that addiction is not the determining factor in this development as Illich seems to believe. In my opinion, addiction occurs after the fact; in other words, the goods are produced and then the advertising media incite the individual to buy the goods. It is true, I think, that a few individuals control the developing technology, but it also seems true that Gintis proposes to give the control of the development of technology to other individuals. In this case the control of the developing technology will merely be in the hands of another kind of selected elite. Gintis' idea seems to reiterate the saying that in a capitalist system man exploits man,

while in the Communist system, it is exactly the reverse.

Gintis disagrees with Illich on the theory of deschooling because, says Gintis, Illich grants the schools the task of creating passive, easy to manipulate people. Therefore, according to Illich, the schools have an indirect effect on society, while Gintis claims that the schools are in every way detrimental. By granting the schools a function, Gintis thinks that Illich implicitly accepts the institution of schooling. But, there is no way that so many individuals can be educated without schools. Moreover, even Illich's alternative of webs cannot work because the individual needs constant guidance. Such a magnitude of information necessary for a reasonable education cannot be assimilated by an individual in a relatively short period of time. If a person will educate himself, at will, without guidance, it will take this person a lifetime to study and even so, many important elements may be ignored by this individual.

Furthermore, the so-called "manipulation" by the school is a normal process of socialization which occurs in any society. The human being, as soon as he agrees to live in society, has to go through a "conformization" process whereby he has to relinquish a part of his own authenticity. As a matter of fact, Gintis should know that himself because it is a well-known fact that the most conformist and manipulative societies are Marxist.

Gintis criticizes Illich for misconceiving the role of the hidden curriculum because the schools do not reproduce the social relations of consumption. In Gintis' opinion the school reproduces the social

relations of production. Neither of them, I believe, is right because said schools are an integral part of society and they reflect that very society, with all its features, good and bad. Besides, if the youngsters are enrolled in any contemporary institution, the result is exactly the same.

Gintis' assertion that industry and other capitalist enterprises economically reward their workers according to their degree of schooling is simplistic to say the least. In my opinion, in our modern society, schooling is a must and therefore it is only normal that a professional engineer is better paid than a construction helper, or that a doctor is better paid than a nurse. Without the knowledge provided by the school, an individual cannot contribute to the common effort to the same degree. Hence, the difference in financial remuneration, which, in turn, also plays the role of an incentive to the students.

The argument that Illich presents that the school stratifies its population according to the students' learning abilities seems futile to me. Moreover, the human species is by natural ability stratified, and if there is school or there is no school, every individual still takes his place in a given society according to his ability. What Gintis and even Illich fail to realize is that every human is different and functions at a different level. In my opinion, men look equal, being physically equipped with the same organs, but the capacity of these organs, including the brains, encompasses a wide range of individual differences. The stratification of society is done according to one's personal ability and the school eventually helps

this stratification, but it does not initiate it.

Gintis declares that Illich's obsession with consumerism impairs his ability to understand how the system works. Gintis is right in this respect but nevertheless Gintis' obsession with Marxism impairs his understanding of the system as well.

Gintis introduces into his critique of Illich his notion of the transitional society which in his opinion is a necessary step towards the ideal society. Gintis criticizes Illich for not including in his theory a "transitional society" whereby the teachers together with the administration and the students control the school. Furthermore, in Gintis' opinion, this transitional system will eventually lead to an ideal system of education. This argument indicates that Gintis has lost contact with reality. Since human beings have lived in common, there is no record in history of an ideal society.

On the same question, Gintis criticizes Illich for not envisaging the necessary struggle in the process of restructuring the system. According to his Marxist credo, Gintis believes that a struggle is necessary for any change and therefore he thinks that Illich should believe the same thing. In order to better things in society, Gintis can see only the Marxist way which has, as a prerequisite for change, a struggle among the various social classes involved. Furthermore, Gintis does not envisage a way to improve the state of education, he just criticizes Illich for not conforming to the Marxist standard.

Gintis' critique of Illich with regard to Cuba and China seems to be valid. I tend to agree with Gintis. The schools in the two above-mentioned countries were virtually nonexistent prior to the change in their social system. Therefore their educational reform did not fail because they did not deschool. Their failure is due to a very complex situation and Illich did not contemplate properly the dynamics playing on this process. In this case I have to reiterate what I have already said, that the school is just a reflection of society and if that society has certain deficiencies, the school reproduces these weaknesses in its day-to-day function. Moreover, it is true that Illich falls short of counting all the variables, but so does Gintis. Gintis' Marxist perception of society impairs his understanding of how the system works as a whole. For Gintis, a radical change for the better in education can take place only if:

1) "An assessment is made in order to identify the conflicting situations existing in the economic life influencing education."<sup>64</sup> All this is true, in my opinion, providing that inconsistencies existing in the economic life of society influence the educational system the way Gintis believes. Furthermore, I believe that the educational system responds to some needs of society, but not necessarily to the needs of some capitalistic elements as Gintis seems to believe.

<sup>64</sup>Gintis, *op. cit.*, p. 17.



2) A climate of awareness has to be fostered among people about the inconsistencies existing in society in order to prevent the manipulation of the masses by the capitalist rulers. I think that ordinary people are aware of the conflicting situations previously mentioned and the masses are already educated about manipulation by the media and by their own unions. Therefore, nowadays it is very hard to manipulate people the way Gintis thinks.

3) A revolutionary movement is created in order to change the present educational system; a movement which has to be initiated by the understanding of the discrepancies reigning in the capitalist society. Unfortunately, a revolutionary movement cannot be created in our modern society because very few people will consider the inconsistencies of our society so stringent that its condition calls for a radical change. The present capitalist system has its participatory aspects in the sense that every contributor to the common effort can manage to have a part of the benefit. Moreover, this share of the benefit, called salary, bonus, commission, etc. entitles the participant to lead a decent life, enjoying the ownership of a house, car and so on; as well as providing for family needs. Along the same line of thought ordinary people with relatively modest incomes succeed in participating in the capitalist game by the ownership of bonds or of all kinds of income generating shares in industry or other kinds of financial venture. Of course, all these allegations are open to discussion, but nevertheless

in North America one can hardly find grounds to begin a revolutionary movement. To link an educational reform to a revolution of the actual North American society is tantamount to relegate this reform "ad kalendas Grekas".

Gintis insists that the actual contradictions in society are due to:

a) The black people being moved to large urban concentrations from independent rural areas in a different wage labor system. It is my belief that the fact that black people were moved from rural to urban areas does not change their situation in society. The same black people who used to live in rural areas in very poor conditions live now in city slums, therefore their situation just involved a change of place.

b) The young people with entrepreneurial aspirations, as well as the educated ones, are confronted with the extinction of opportunities and the banalization of work in factories. At this point, Gintis contradicts himself because he implicitly recognizes the capacity of the school to educate. By stating that young educated people face a scarcity of jobs in society and lack of opportunity, Gintis places himself in an awkward position because it is a well-known fact that the North American industry favors the young over the old. Moreover, this

unsustained allegation of Gintis' is not necessarily true because the official statistics do not support it. Furthermore, the current appearance of a new class of very successful youngsters of both sexes in society, commonly called Yuppies, totally eradicates Gintis' claim in this regard.

c) The women being victimized by a system which is geared towards achievement and industrial output only. This allegation of Gintis' does not need any elaboration, especially now, as the human rights and the women's liberation movement have changed many aspects of our society. Incidentally, the changes in women's status in society is a superb example of change without revolution (*Quod erat demonstrandum*).

Obsessed by the idea of a final revolution and a complete change, Gintis strongly believes in the need for a transitional society. In his opinion, this is the next step from the capitalist society towards a "worker paradise". Therefore, any criticism or attempt to change the actual social set-up is assessed by Gintis according to the following criterion: Is this move leading to a transitional society? In my opinion, Gintis is handicapped in his appraisal of society by his prevalent Marxist preconceptions and Illich has much the same problem due to his religious medieval idea of social structure.

In regard to Illich's theory of deschooling Gintis believes that if it were implemented, this theory would eventually create social chaos without correcting the flaws of the capitalist system. Moreover,

Gintis believes that a deschooling process will never take place because schools are an integral part of society. I believe that Gintis is right when he believes that deschooling will never take place. As Gintis says, the school is a vital link in society and even if it has some drawbacks, it still performs efficiently enough to avoid discarding it. With all its shortcomings, the main purpose of the school is to educate. The school has many detractors, but it still provides an education to the youngsters; therefore it is far from being useless.

Gintis criticizes Illich's idea that schools are not organized against attacks and so can be liberated. In Gintis' opinion, an attack on schools will not necessarily trigger a "domino effect" spreading to other institutions. Because Gintis cannot conceive that flaws in society can be corrected without a radical change he thinks that Illich's theory, if implemented, will be an isolated occurrence. This assertion contradicts directly his former statement that abolishing school will provoke social change.

Finally, Gintis sees a different way of remedying the state of affairs in schools. According to Gintis, the struggle should be encouraged in schools between students and teachers as well as between teachers and the school administration. Moreover, according to Gintis, this struggle will train the participants for future struggles in society. At this point, I would like to contradict Gintis because in my opinion, struggle can only be detrimental to the educational

process. Instead of cooperating towards the common goal which is to enhance the educational level of the students, a lot of counterproductive energy will be spent in unnecessary squabbles.

Gintis discusses Illich's theory point by point. However, in my opinion, it seems very inconclusive. Gintis fails, I feel, because he does not address himself to the core of the problem. In other words, Gintis does not present a clear, coherent idea of whether we should deschool or not. Moreover, it is not clearly demonstrated in his critique if the school has a certain role in society or not. At one point he declares school to be useless but in another of his arguments he claims that educated youngsters cannot find jobs. By this assertion, he implicitly grants some value to education and subsequently to the schools. His whole critique seems to be totally dependent on a Marxist theory of deschooling. According to Gintis most of the weaknesses in Illich's theory reside in the arguments where it does not conform to the Marxist standard. Conversely, Gintis accords a few positive points to Illich only as long as it concurs with the Marxist theory. Therefore, in his critique Gintis only presents the Marxist point of view vis-à-vis Illich's ideas without contributing anything else that is positive to the debate.

b) On Carl G. Hedman's commentary<sup>65</sup>

Hedman attacks Gintis' critique claiming that Illich does not accept either the communist or the capitalist system. According to Hedman, while being against the capitalist system due to some of its

<sup>65</sup> Hedman, Carl G., The Deschooling Controversy Revisited: A Defense of Illich's Participatory Socialism.

1 shortcomings, Illich rejects also hierarchical socialism with all its flaws. While he defends Illich, Hedman repeats the same mistake, by foreseeing a participatory type of socialism. In participatory socialism, a class of workers emerge from their political passivity and take charge of their own destiny.

Personally, I believe that Hedman does not take into account the human species which, in my opinion, contains many more followers than leaders. In my view, Hedman's idea that Illich does not want to destroy a political system in order to change it for another, is probably correct. Illich, in Hedman's opinion as well as mine, wants to change the obviously bad aspects of the capitalist system, without going to the extreme of disposing of it. Illich, faithful to his medieval concept of society, wants to change the actual social set-up in a different way.

Hedman's assumption that Illich says the same thing as Gintis is, in my opinion, highly exaggerated. Hedman defends Illich against Gintis' critique that Illich "naively" trusts good human nature to develop and take over society. Moreover, Hedman explains that Illich rejects any élite, socialist or capitalist, which exerts control over society. I believe that this negative assumption of Illich's may be right but will not generate a class of leaders among the ordinary people, by the mere fact of rejecting the élites.

Hedman defends Illich also in the matter of the hidden curriculum being active in Cuban schools. In this respect, Hedman claims that Illich is misunderstood by Gintis because the Cuban schooling system is

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considered by Illich as a failure due to the existence of the hidden curriculum. I differ in this matter with Hedman and Illich because I believe that the hidden curriculum is a by-product of any kind of social set-up. The school as a reflection of Cuban society inherently reflects Castro's political dogma in its hidden curriculum. I tend to agree with Hedman's conclusion in regard to Gintis' critique of Illich, except for one point. Hedman concludes that Gintis is not aware of the fact that both are asking for changes in society in their different ways. My point is that in education, Gintis reflects the Marxist position and rejects any other stance in this matter, while Illich is genuine in his theory and does not favor any ideology.

c) On Brian Birchall's commentary<sup>66</sup>

Birchall defends the schools against Illich's attack claiming that they are not as manipulative and opposed to education as Illich pretends. In my opinion, the hidden curriculum appears to be unavoidable not only in schools but also the society itself has a hidden curriculum as a by-product. Furthermore, it would be naive to believe that youngsters who never went to school and who go straight to the work force will not be affected by a certain hidden curriculum which is a by-product of their life in society. In this respect, I think that schools have a beneficial introductory role, because an individual who lives in society has to comply with its hidden code of rules anyway, notwithstanding the educational process.

<sup>66</sup> Birchall, Brian, Some Misconceptions in Ivan Illich.

As far as the argument for compulsory attendance is concerned, I tend to agree with Birchall in regard to Illich's view of freedom as unrestrained compulsiveness. Furthermore, Birchall's argument that compulsive attendance provides the student with a break in the narrow circle of home life, seems very valid. By attending school, the child has the opportunity to call into question the values and myths acquired at home. Moreover, the student's outlook in life might be changed by the confrontation with other "home philosophies" -- hopefully for the better.

Birchall's attack on Illich's theory of the "hierarchy through certification" seems well founded because there has to be a natural selection in society. Men may be created equal but their intellectual capacity differs, and this is a fact. Therefore, the best equipped people should lead in their respective fields. The school merely facilitates a process which will continue throughout life.

Illich's claim that students are passive recipients while the teacher is imparting the knowledge is rightly debated by Birchall. The information offered by the teacher falls on deaf ears, if not processed by the students' minds. Therefore Birchall correctly believes that education involves participation. Of course, there has to be an interaction between teacher and class in order to have a viable instructional process. Therefore, Illich's claim to the contrary is not acceptable.

Birchall also debates Illich's claim that "not everyone wants to learn the same thing". Birchall is right in this respect because the



development of the human mind is a fine art which entails dispensing certain elements of knowledge at a certain time. Moreover, this process permits the mind to absorb, digest and reflect upon the said elements of knowledge in view of further development. A child without experience cannot assess the educational value of certain items of knowledge and decide on their priority in the educational process. Birchall maintains that a child cannot decide if he should learn or not and what he should learn because he does not have the maturity, nor the necessary comprehension entailed by such a decision. Birchall calls the capacity of assessing the available information "critical inquiry". In order to attain this critical inquiry one has to learn a fixed curriculum as a prerequisite.

I believe that Birchall is right in his critique, that there is a need for a person's mind to acquire basic knowledge in order to be able to process more knowledge. In order to achieve this task in the shortest period of time in a structured way, only a fixed curriculum is necessary. Consequently, Illich's claim that a fixed curriculum is against education is invalid. Therefore, the fixed curriculum is an integral and necessary part of education.

Birchall is absolutely right when he states that contrary to Illich's idea, students may develop interest while they are engaged in the process of learning. Moreover, I strongly believe that an individual wants to learn only after he has learned to learn. The student has no intent to learn until he acquires a certain ability to learn which may lead to curiosity and eventually to a desire for further learning. At

the beginning, the average student goes through the motions of learning in order to satisfy different exigencies imposed on him by his family and teachers. Only in the process of learning can the student develop an interest which will motivate him to study even further.

Birchall is also correct in rejecting Illich's idea that students are indoctrinated in school and therefore that they exhibit no interest in learning.

d) On Michael Macklin's commentary<sup>67</sup>

In his critique, Macklin takes Illich's side against Birchall. I believe that Macklin has a valid point in his criticism against Birchall when he points out that Birchall fails to address himself to Illich's main argument against schools. Illich's main argument against schools is that they are manipulative, they change their function into a monopoly, and they brainwash the students turning them into people incapable of reforming the schools.

Macklin seems to be correct when he points out that Illich does not advocate a school free of all constraints. He is opposed only to the constraints hindering education. I think that the main problem would be, in order to avoid misunderstanding, to define which constraints are harmful to education and which are not. For instance, the theory advanced by Illich that the school encroaches upon the students' freedom by forcing them to learn a fixed curriculum, is accepted by Macklin. In my opinion, there are necessary educational

<sup>67</sup> Macklin, Michael, Those Misconceptions Are Not Illich's.

elements which have to be developed in the student's mind like linguistics and arithmetic basics. This would be a clear case of inculcation which is absolutely necessary for further education. To me there is a fine line to be observed by teachers between education and drilled inculcation but nevertheless every educator has to perform this delicate balancing act.

Macklin agrees with Illich that the blame should be placed on the educational system which ignores any education not acquired through the regular channels. I believe that this is incorrect, because an individual who reaches a certain level or background of intellectual knowledge, is accepted in society as such. Through conferences, publications and interviews one can reach a public intellectual stature without going through the regular academic channels. Many writers and composers succeeded in achieving excellence on the social scene without school credentials. In the case of professionals like engineers, pilots, lawyers or doctors, I am against Illich's theory which is supported by Macklin, specifically because of the need for a fixed curriculum. A professional in the exercise of his duty may need at a certain point in time certain specific information. This information is part of his professional background, acquired through the fixed curriculum, and the lack of it may have serious consequences.

Furthermore, Macklin, in Illich's defense, challenges Birchall to establish parameters with regard to what has to be learned and when. It is true that it is very difficult to tailor a curriculum which will

suit every individual's intellectual need. Nevertheless, the experts have already determined that within a group of roughly the same age, give or take a few years, certain items of knowledge can be profitably dispensed.

As far as the ethical aspects of learning are concerned, there is again a fine equilibrium to be observed between the will of the child to cooperate and the teaching ability of the teacher. The parents force their children to wash against their will, but this seems perfectly normal in society. Macklin is correct when he agrees with Illich that the school must provide the necessary elements to the learning process, but it is also true that the school must insist that the student internalize the elements absolutely necessary for further development. Unless these necessary elements of knowledge are assimilated by the student, the whole exercise is void. The formative aspect of education is crucial.

In the matter of theory advanced by Illich that the school discriminates among its students on the basis of acquired knowledge, Macklin contradicts Birchall's view that the failure of some students is due to lack of understanding. In my opinion, Macklin may be partially right in the sense that some of the students may not have that particular frame of mind or ability which may enable them to incorporate different items of knowledge in their intellectual background. Moreover, some of these students do not lack intelligence, nor intellectual capacity, but their way of understanding and interpreting is incompatible with the way the school is presenting some

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items of knowledge.

In this matter of items of knowledge, there is further controversy between Macklin and Birchall over Illich's theory of supplier-consumer analogy. In this theory, Illich states that the teacher presents prepackaged knowledge to the student, conditioning him to react to this kind of knowledge by rote instead of actual understanding. Macklin uses this theory in support of his argument that Illich is not considering education as just acquiring items of knowledge. I think that education acquired in one part of the world in school or out of school never appeared to be in conflict with education acquired in another part of the world. Therefore this universality of the knowledge acquired by the students contradicts Illich's theory of conditioned response.

Macklin defends once more Illich against Birchall, who contends that education is confined to a certain curriculum. On the contrary, says Macklin, Illich is flexible in this respect but is concerned with the technical values prominent in the educational process which pertain to material abundance. It seems to me that the school should be the factor which facilitates the introduction of the individual in society. Therefore, the main task of the school is to provide the individual with the necessary knowledge which eventually will help this individual to perform in society. Illich's theory, sustained by Macklin against Birchall, that only one segment of society gains from this materialistic orientation of the school appears to be untrue.

I believe that the first beneficiary of the education acquired in school is the student who will be rewarded for his knowledge by a good

salary. Nowadays, in my opinion, anybody willing to learn regardless of his social class, has a chance of better working conditions and a better salary, because of his scholarship. Moreover, the idea of a special group taking advantage of other groups exists only in the imagination of Illich and Macklin. It is very true that in society there is fierce competition for higher positions and better remuneration. Nevertheless, there are no organized groups in this respect. Family connections and personal social relationships may help one to climb the social hierarchy, but only up to a certain extent. If this social back-up is not sustained by a strong ability and intelligence, the results will be unexceptional. This is the situation regarding scholarly degrees and organized groups in society, without delving into political and other considerations.

Another idea of Illich's, supported by Macklin, is that the school should change its orientation but cannot initiate such a move due to its dependency on a privileged group in society. Macklin is disregarding the fact that the school is supported by all segments of society, everybody seeing it as a means for their children to get ahead in life.

e) On Ignatio Gotz's commentary<sup>68</sup>

Ignatio Gotz is, in my opinion, one of the most balanced critics of Illich. His approach is true to his conservative stand and he stays away from exaggerations. Gotz begins his critique by stating that he

<sup>68</sup> Gotz, Ignacio L., On Man and His Schooling.

considers Illich's educational theory as a radical trend and that such a theory appears eccentric to many Americans. I personally support Gotz's alternative to Illich's proposal. In his alternative, he is opposed to Illich's proposal to disband the schools; Gotz wants to modify these schools in order to better serve society. Furthermore, Gotz explains that there is no point in disposing of the existing institutions in order to replace them with other structures.

In regard to Gotz's concept of the pedagogic paradox that the better the schools, the greater the harmful effect of the hidden curriculum, I would beg to differ. My opposition to this idea is addressed first to Illich and then to Gotz. This hidden curriculum far from alienating serves the students as an introduction to society. What Gotz and Illich fail to realize is that the weakness of human institutions lies in the fact that they are human, not because they are institutions. As long as there are institutions in society, these institutions will carry the effects of human weaknesses. These weaknesses are built into and inseparable from human nature, as the hidden curriculum seems to be unavoidable because it is part of the same human nature. Therefore this hidden curriculum will appear in all human institutions and will affect all human endeavours.

Gotz recognizes the radicalism of Illich's proposal but contrary to those who declare Illich's alternative unworkable e.g. Bereiter, he seems to believe that deschooling is feasible. At this point, I would like to ask the question why Gotz is in favor of disbanding a system which

obviously works. The fact that this system works is confirmed because it produced so many educated people; while the proposed alternative to this system has never been tried, therefore it involves a high risk quotient.

Moreover, Gotz defends Illich's alternative against Bereiter's criticism that there are not enough teachers trained to deal with a deschooled situation. In the case of a lack of experienced teachers Gotz believes that a substitute for experience can be found as need arises, on the spot, so to speak, by the empowered people. But, I think that there are not many persons in society able to deal with a deschooled situation. I cannot envisage a state of affairs in which all of the youngsters are turned loose, without supervision and left alone most of the time to guide their own destiny. Especially at this moment in time when the school is very much alive and there is an outcry from the public because the young are unsupervised, and undisciplined, with drug abuse, teenage gangs, teenage crimes and bad behaviour in general.

Gotz is also against Birchall's accusation that Illich promotes élitism through deschooling for the obvious reason that only wealthy parents could afford individual instruction and guidance. In this case, the children of a poor family would be left completely without education, with no chance for the future. This is a very sound argument, and if the schools were to be abolished, many underprivileged parents might succumb to the temptation of having an extra income for the family by sending the teenager to work. In the present set-up,



every child has an identity as a student, a *raison d'être* so to speak. His lifestyle and aims are set. A change of the magnitude of the deschooling proposal could disrupt many youngsters' lives as well as that of their parents. Moreover, there is a strong possibility that the young may be tempted to join criminal elements in society because being without skills or education crime may look to some of them as a tempting alternative.

Ending his rebuttal of Birchall's critique against Illich, Gotz turns against Gintis' critique of Illich's theories. In the first place, Gotz sees that the schools are a reflection of society, which is a well-founded view. Furthermore, Gotz points out that the students and the teachers are part of the social mass. Consequently, I think that Gotz correctly assesses that the schools are an effect of the socioeconomic structure and not the cause, as Illich and Gintis seem to believe. As I have mentioned before, Gotz with his analytical mind seems to analyze the whole question of deschooling in a very logical fashion.

Moreover, Ignatic Gotz shows that Gintis fails to realize that Illich is fighting for the Christian principle of the right of man to freedom. Illich is not against schools or manipulation, he is against whatever prevents man from reaching his full potential. If we consider the situation from Illich's perspective, the deschooling theory appears to be valid, on the grounds that schools are alienating man from his freedom and preventing man from striving for perfectibility. The weak point of this theory is that the problem should be

considered in its social context. In my opinion, in reality society itself through all its agencies can alienate man from his freedom and often prevent him from attaining his full potential. Illich and Gotz, as well as Gintis, fail to envisage the problem of education in its entire magnitude.

f) On Francis Schrag's commentary<sup>69</sup>

Schrag begins his argument with the problem of structures in society. These structures are necessary, argues Schrag, but of course they have some drawbacks since they are created by humans. In Schrag's opinion, the difficulties with these structures are avoidable and it is up to the humans to ameliorate them and adapt them to their needs. In regard to the elitism allegedly promoted by the schools, Schrag argues that in countries with virtually no schools the élites are stronger than in countries with organized schools.

Francis Schrag is absolutely right when he states that it is important to see what kind of structures there are in society, so that we should implement a process of screening in order to see which ones are efficient and which are detrimental to society. As an example, the automobile is built by man and can be a direct killer as well as a heavy polluter, but, at the same time, it may also be a major contributor to human progress and well being. Therefore, the socioeconomic structures should be carefully examined and altered in order to contribute as efficiently as possible to the humane struggle for "paidea".

<sup>69</sup> Schrag, Francis, Reply to Gotz on Deschooling.

In general Schrag does not take a firm position for or against Illich's theories in this debate. I think that Schrag represents the conservative majority who take the middle road in this dispute. He concedes that the institutions have some drawbacks but appreciates the fact that they are necessary for society in order to function. I subscribe entirely to Francis Schrag's view in this respect and I also agree with his proposal to scrutinize carefully the schools in order to determine their efficiency as well as their weaknesses.

Moreover, while promoting moderation on the deschooling issue, Schrag repeats the obvious question which comes to everybody's mind:- How is it that many deschoolers are highly educated and how can a person be neutral after years of being exposed to the hidden curriculum in schools? These two questions qualify Schrag as a conservative, yet pragmatic and lucid critic of Illich.

## CHAPTER VI. CONCLUSION

Illich thinks that education is a very important, dynamic factor in the community and he tries to use it as a means to improve or change the malaise of contemporary society. He is concerned with the unrest exhibited by society, and especially by the "realities", as he calls it, of Africa and Latin America, with which he is very familiar.

Ivan Illich attributes the source of social problems to the need for societies to reproduce alienated patterns of consumption. He states that our actual institutions are creating the need to make the process more important than the end. In his opinion, the actual institutions are creating the need for more institutions (services) with all their inefficiencies. In his book Deschooling Society, he focuses on the school as one of these institutions which, in his opinion, confuses teaching with learning, grade advancement with education, diplomas with competence, and fluency with the ability to say something new.

Illich has an important contribution to make in the pursuit of the "ideal formula" for education in the sense that he tries to envisage a working structure of the school. Unfortunately he is obsessed with this phenomenon of consumption, which is one of the characteristics of a capitalistic society. He believes that consumption leads to more consumption, and that all society's institutions create the need for more institutions (services), thus establishing a vicious circle, and

turning the means into an end, with the people caught in the process.

Illich's main quarrel with the existing educational system is that he sees the school as a materialistic tool. He considers the school in the North American society as being just one more institution in which the needs of the people which the school is supposed to serve, are considered secondary to the needs of the growth of the institution itself. Illich believes that the school, as an element of social control, is partly responsible for this situation. He is concerned with the fact that the school promotes "ideological propaganda", which is manipulated by external interests.

One of Illich's main arguments against the school is that it fosters a "hidden curriculum". In his opinion, through the "hidden curriculum", the school indoctrinates the student to accept the current social setting. According to Illich, this "hidden curriculum" is responsible for the transmission of traditional values to the youngsters. By the same token, by this means the students are initiated into the customs and rituals of their contemporary society. Furthermore, the "hidden curriculum" inculcates a complete philosophy and way of life to the student. This way of life ranges from the passive acceptance of the discrepancies in wealth and social positions, to the acceptance of different myths transmitted by the school, such as the myth of scholarship and competence.

However, I believe that scholarship is not a myth; it is a real fact because the school provides its students with a perspective in life which can hardly be matched any other way. Illich wants to revamp the social establishment and he begins with the school which, in his opinion, is at the base of any social structure. According to Illich, the school indoctrinates and maintains, especially through the "hidden curriculum", the status quo in society. Therefore, the school is the vital point to be attacked and changed in order to change society. Hence, his attack on the actual educational system.

The school as an institution serves society. Hence, the school is a reflection of that very society in which it functions and if "manipulation" or "guiding" or "direction" is impressed upon the students by the school, it is because the school's purpose is to serve society, by developing the intellect of the students. There is a balance between society's needs and individual interests in education which have to be maintained, and this can be accomplished without going to the extremes of deschooling a society.

I would say that Ivan Illich is living proof that schools work because if he is able to assess the effects of school upon society, even if he does so in a biased way, this is due to his intellectual background, which he received mostly from his institutional education. The school has, to be sure, many shortcomings, but knowledge and logic, which lead to further development, have to be learned in an organized way. This has to be done mainly in a structured environment such as

the school. In my opinion, schools are effective, but discretion should be applied by the empowered people re: attendance, curriculum, educational attitude, etc. We cannot discard a working reality like the school, based on the hope that some other hypothetical structures will be able to supersede and function better than the ones we dismiss.

Ivan Illich's idea of abolishing the school system appears to be confused, but probably he aimed at decreasing the bureaucracy of the system with all its drawbacks.

Some of Illich's proposals seem to be better formulated than others. His proposal to allow individuals to teach without demonstrating their competence may have unwanted consequences. Some highly questionable characters may take advantage of "loopholes" in the system. They may turn the educational process into a mockery and spoil the system for well-intentioned educators as well as for the students.

Illich's proposal to institute referral services for educational purposes seems to be very useful, but I think that these services would be much more effective if they complement a structured system like the school.

Nevertheless, I firmly believe that people in education should take notice of this proposal and envisage a way to implement this concept. After a careful assessment of Illich's alternatives, I agree that he appears to be as liberal in his views as Tolstoy or Rousseau. Moreover, in the same spirit, he considers every individual as a separate entity, free to decide the course he wants to take in life.

Contrary to other thinkers like Plato and Skinner, Illich believes that society should be "destructured", in order to

fulfill human needs. He stresses the need for the individual in society to function as independently as possible, and to realize his full individual potential.

In view of Illich's theory, I think that in order to arrive at a maturity on one's intellectual capacities, one has to have some logical basis, as well as a certain background of knowledge which cannot be acquired in a short period of time, especially in unstructured conditions. The educational process provided by the school, leads to an intellectual maturity of the spirit. Moreover, this process can take place only at certain periods, with elements of knowledge being dispensed according to a certain intellectual ability to comprehend at a certain point in time. Piaget and Kohlberg, as well as Thorndyke, among others, demonstrated that one is ready to acquire certain given notions and to perform certain judgments only at a certain point in his intellectual development. To leave this, as Illich advocates, to the discretion of the individual, is tantamount to leaving a sick individual to treat himself, using doctors only as "reference persons". Actually, Illich, like Socrates, advocates emphasizing "process" over "content" in education. He discards direct learning as "indoctrination".

In the educational process, a certain equilibrium, I believe, should be observed between teaching and indoctrination, by the teaching person, otherwise we either "reinvent the wheel" every time we are teaching or we are passing data and information through a mechanical



process denounced by Illich as indoctrination. Moreover, I personally think that some indoctrination of this sort is an integral part of the educational process; it can be beneficial even necessary if not abused.

An important flaw in Illich's theory is that he applies the same formula to South America and North America. This is definitely not appropriate because Illich is superimposing some of the South American problems on the North American context. By trying to implement some of his theories which may be valid for South America within the North American situation, he defeats his own purpose.

As a matter of fact, Illich's experience with the North American system seems to be very limited. In New York, where he stayed just long enough to obtain American citizenship, he had personal contact mostly with his Puerto Rican parishioners who were recent immigrants. After he left Puerto Rico, in his teaching days at Fordham University, he dealt only with a specific segment of the North American population, namely university students. Furthermore, "he could not establish a real intellectual contact with his North American students who did not relate to the problems presented by him", according to Francine DuPlessis Gray. Actually, it seems that he did not acquire any experience in this area while he was at Incarnation Parish.<sup>70</sup>

While I am noting Illich's weaknesses, I cannot help but think that Illich, because of his rich intellectual background from his childhood, mistakenly assumed that everybody begins his life with the same "subliminally inherited" academic knowledge. This is not the case

<sup>70</sup>DuPlessis, *op. cit.*, p. 267.

for many students, due to the lack of an intellectual environment in their family. Therefore, in the event of a deschooled society, many students would be deprived of a great deal of necessary knowledge which could have been attained in school.

On the other hand, Illich's knowledge of South American people seems to be much more advanced. In this respect, I think that Illich's stay at the University of Puerto Rico, as well as his contact with Paolo Freire, Sergio Mendez Arceo and other South American personalities, contributed to Illich's knowledge of the South American life. Moreover, Illich's travels through Puerto Rico and South America, in general, must have helped him to develop an understanding of the South American people. Therefore, I find his theory of deschooling to be a reaction to the South American situation, such as the learning webs which seem to be much more applicable to South America. Moreover, in South America there is little money for schools; therefore makeshift buildings, eventually webs, can easily suit the purpose. In order to accommodate the North American scene, Illich conferred on these webs all kinds of modern instructional aids like tape recorders and computers. Nevertheless, the web can function very well without this technical paraphernalia especially in the South American context. Moreover, the South American society, due to its low industrial level, is still at the stage where it needs many craftsmen and artisans. Such people can be easily trained by experienced master craftsmen who have no formal education but great skill and experience. Furthermore, a

deschooled situation is much more suitable to countries where there are still many rural settlements. In North America, to deschool society in massive urban concentrations like New York or Los Angeles is practically unthinkable.

In conjunction with the theory of deschooling, there is a possibility that Ivan Illich, like Winston Churchill and Albert Einstein, among others, developed a different frame of mind than the average student. Since the curriculum was tailored for the average person, some bright students seemed to have difficulties due to their inability to follow the slow learning pace of their curriculum.

In conclusion, I think that it is conceivable that Illich holds a resentment against the school due to his early negative experiences as a student. Moreover, there is also the possibility that Illich was not aware of the origins of his anti-school drive. Furthermore, if this should be the case, Illich's whole theory of deschooling takes on the aspect of a late vendetta of Illich versus the school system. Illich, who was brought up in an aristocratic milieu, may resent the new societal hierarchy promoted by the school. These days a lot of youngsters go to universities and become successful professionals who disregard the old establishment of society.

Besides, according to his biography, Illich never actually taught in a regular elementary or high school. Therefore, it is hard to believe that he can really assess the actuality that is taking place in such a school. In order to have an intimate knowledge of the effects of the hidden curriculum, one should spend a few years teaching day

after day. Moreover, no matter how much perspicacity one possesses or how much one reads about the hidden curriculum, without daily experience in the field, one will acquire only a superficial view of the whole matter.

The same perspective applies, in a way, to Illich's efforts to protect South American people from the Yankee influence. It is true that Illich has a working knowledge of South America, but does he really know what its people want? Furthermore, Illich instituted the Centro de Documentacion in Mexico, but people who attended its courses maintain that: "He seems to be a house revolutionary presently running a school for affluent Americans who have flunked Spanish."<sup>71</sup>

There is another aspect of Ivan Illich that seems to be very intriguing. By his actions and beliefs, Illich demonstrated clearly that he is a man of high ethics, especially when he renounced his priesthood. The rationale for his abdication from the priesthood was that he believed that the controversy over his theories would harm the Church. In my opinion, it is very hard to reconcile this high ethical morality with the fact that as a naturalized U.S. citizen he went to South America to fight his own adopted country, for he struggled for the de-yankeefication of South America.

In conclusion, it is my opinion that the school, with all its drawbacks, is the only suitable environment for study. Education is too important a matter to be left to the whim of individuals in society. In the final analysis, Illich shows concern for the way his

<sup>71</sup>Ozmon, Howard, The School of Deschooling, Phi Delta Kappan, v. 55 (November, 1973).

contemporary society functions and provides positive suggestions which should be considered. However, I believe that discretion should be applied in assessing his proposals with regard to their validity and possible implementation.

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