

Rethinking the Origins of British Colonial School Systems

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One of the more rewarding scholarly developments over the last decade or so has been the growth of contacts between Australian and Canadian historians of education and the concomitant interest in the comparative development of education in our two countries. In this essay I want to review some recent Australian and Canadian discussions of the relationship between class and gender and the formation of state school systems. I propose to begin with an analysis of that relationship as formulated in the recent bicentennial histories of Australia and then conclude with a speculative account of the role of a crisis in patriarchal relations in the origins of mass schooling. This account summarizes a central aspect of a collaborative research project with Pavla Miller in which we hope to provide a more comprehensive explanation of the rise of schooling that is applicable to colonial societies as well as Britain, Europe, and the eastern seaboard of the United States.

It is particularly appropriate that I should have the opportunity to air this account in a new Canadian journal not only because some of my most formative intellectual years were spent in Canada but also because the argument has its origins in our dissatisfaction with the revisionist approach which I had been involved in helping formulate in Canada in the 1970s. As I have recently noted in *History of Education Review*,¹ the central assumption of the relationship between urbanization, industrialization, and schooling, or in its marxist formulation, industrial capitalism and schooling, was difficult to apply in predominantly agricultural societies like most of the British colonies. Moreover, our argument owes much to feminist historians in Canada as well as Australia, Britain, and the United States, and the particular formulation of the crisis in patriarchal relations had its genesis in discussions Pavla and I separately had with Canadian scholars—most notably Alison Prentice, Wally Seccombe, Bruce Curtis, and David Levine—at OISE in 1985 and 1986.

The bicentenary of white settlement in Australia in 1988 has generated a plethora of new histories. The most substantial (and expensive) of these is the eleven-volume *Australians: A Historical Library*, produced by some four hundred historians in a mammoth collaborative enterprise, and incorporating the controversial "slice" approach in three of the volumes. Some of the authors involved in *Australians* have also contributed to another major collaborative history, the four-volume *A People's History of Australia since 1788*, which is a self-consciously oppositional social history written from the viewpoint of the losers rather than the winners. As well, Oxford University Press is in the process of publishing a more conventional five-volume *History of Australia* in which

individual authors have been commissioned to write an account of a particular period in Australian history. These histories, and many of the other publications spawned by the bicentennial fever, have provided a stimulating reappraisal of the development of Australian society, especially as some have focussed on previously neglected aspects such as Aboriginal Australia and the social history of everyday life. Moreover, many of them incorporate accounts of educational practices and childhood experience in their analyses, providing a good indication of the integration of the history of education into Australian social history.

Importantly, for our purposes, most of the major histories devote considerable space to the analysis of class, gender, and race relationships in Australia although, apart from the obvious exception of *A People's History*, the importance of these themes varies both within and between volumes and the theoretical perspectives are often disparate. Hence, the "ordinary reader" (fool) hardy enough to wade through *Australians*, *A People's History*, and the published volumes of the Oxford series is unlikely to come away with a coherent framework for interpreting class and gender formation in Australian history although she/he will be aware of the importance of these processes in the development of Australian society. At the same time, the various bicentennial histories have inevitably tended to concentrate on the uniquely Australian although the British origins of contemporary Australia have been a major preoccupation. Comparisons with other British colonies are relatively rare and there is little investigation of the role of the colonial state in structuring social and institutional development in Australia and elsewhere. Thus the reader will also be left without an adequate comparative context to make sense of Australian social development. She/he will learn a lot about the social history of Australia and largely, even in *Australians*, without too much of the celebratory cant which usually characterizes such histories. Yet for sometimes different theoretical and methodological reasons the reader of *Australians* or *A People's History* will be short-changed if she/he is seeking an explanation of the historical development of Australian society.

Australians: A Historical Library (Fairfax, Syme & Weldon) is an extraordinary achievement. Some 400 historians and other scholars collaborated to produce an eleven-volume series which includes five reference books, an historical atlas, and five "history books" with, as the publisher's blurb says, "two million words of text, more than 3000 illustrations, photographs and maps," many of which are in colour. It's a pity it costs \$A695 plus postage! The five "history books" feature a first volume on Aboriginal Australia to 1788, a final volume on Australia from 1939 to 1988, and three "slice" volumes at fifty-year intervals—1838, 1888, and 1938—which focus on life in Australia in a particular year. The editors of each volume approached their tasks quite differently. "1888" was written by a tightly knit group of seventeen historians; "1938" was built around the oral histories of hundreds of ordinary Australians. All of them, though, are very much *social* histories focussing on the patterns of everyday life, and each is richly textured and evokes a sense of the period, often summoning up quite

stunning and refreshingly new images to illustrate the argument. All, except the last volume, contain much for the historian of education as the lives and school experiences of children of the rich and poor, male and female, rural and urban, feature prominently. Importantly, they all explore Aboriginal experience in some detail, redressing an imbalance in the historiography of Australia, and they examine the clash between the ceremonial and informal patterns of education in Aboriginal societies and the "christianizing and civilising" institutional forms brought to bear by their white conquerors.

Class and gender relations are central to the analysis of everyday life in most volumes of *Australians* although the "slice" approach and the huge number of collaborating historians made it difficult to develop any coherent understanding of class and gender formation over time. The contributors to the "slice" volumes were under strict instructions from the "Annales"-influenced editors to try to reconstruct social life in the particular year—1838, 1888, and 1938—and to avoid what one of the general editors dubbed "prochronisms." The prescription to write as though we did not know what happened later was, of course, theoretically absurd and led to a tendency to grab the quotable quotidien quip to colour our descriptive passages and, equally, a tendency to shackle our historical analyses. At the same time, a multitude of authors, whose perspectives described the political rainbow (except for the brilliant red of the pristine left), inevitably meant that the various pictures of class and gender relations in everyday life are refracted through different lenses. Given the British influence on Australian historiography, the analysis of class looms large in the picture although, more often than not, it reflects stratificationist theories of upper, middle, and lower classes rather than marxist-inspired theories of antagonistic relations between capital and labour. Given the more begrudging acceptance of the importance of the critiques of feminist historians, the analyses of gender relations are less overt although, especially in the 1838 volume which is the most radical in its politics, they are given emphasis. There are no references to the sexual division of labour or patriarchal relations in the indexes to the volumes although "capitalism" and "working class" (along with middle and lower class or "the poor") do feature.

As we might expect, this is not the case in *The People's History* which at \$A16.95 a volume from McPhee Gribble/Penguin is a bargain compared to *Australians*. The major organizing principles of the four volumes are class, gender, and race and *The People's History* provides a thematic analysis from a leftwing perspective of the colonizing process, everyday life, cultural forms, and political processes since 1788. As the editors point out in their introduction, it does not claim to be a general history or comprehensive in its scope as, they argue, "the web of historical narrative is only a thin tissue of approved knowledge about a complex and contradictory social universe." Still, the various chapters traverse a wide range of themes in the social history of Australia, including childhood and schooling, and, like *Australians*, involve many fine descriptive passages of the lives of ordinary people. However, *The People's History* differs fundamentally from *Australians* in its structure and theoretical content. It is organized themati-

cally and the chapters range over the 200 years of white settlement. Hence the authors were presented with precisely the opposite problem of that confronting those writing the "slice" chapters in *Australians* — how to mould the descriptive content into a theoretically coherent narrative. This inevitably led to simplistic accounts of the social forces at work in the making of contemporary Australia. At the same time, each chapter emphasizes the dominant role of the power relations of class, gender, and race in the formation of Australian society and the volumes provide an important contrast with the blander descriptive accounts in the "official" history. Not surprisingly, though, class relations dominate the theoretical agenda in *The People's History*. While gender and race relations are given considerable importance, in most contributions they are subordinated to class relations in the final analysis.

The analysis of the role of the state is another major difference between the two histories. The role of the state in the development of Australia flits in and out of *Australians* whereas it is the object of sustained analysis in *A People's History*, not only in the chapters devoted specifically to it but also in most of the others. Overall, these differences in emphasis represent differences in theoretical perspectives. Both histories acknowledge the crucial role of the state in the formation of convict Australia but the interpretations diverge as we approach the present. In *Australians*, the state tends to become less visible, less powerful, in the transition from government by brute force to government through institutional structures. In *The People's History* the intrusive role of the state in shaping social relations in the interests of the powerful remains a constant theme to the present day. However, neither pays much attention to the international aspects of state formation although *The People's History* provides a more thorough and powerful analysis of the role of British capitalism and the British state in the development of Australia. While it is not surprising that the bicentennial histories should focus only on the implications of British policy for Australia, it is, nonetheless, disappointing. Obviously, the origins and development of the colonies can only be understood in the context of British imperial ambitions and the needs of British capital and, therefore, the view from Westminster is of critical importance. Decisions about Australia were made in relation to decisions about other British colonies in North America, India, and elsewhere, and not in isolation, and they were driven by British rather than colonial interests. Moreover, the development of the administrative apparatus of the colonial state in Australia (and elsewhere) owed much to the experience of British administrators in other colonies—consider the impact of the Irish National System on the development of schooling, for example—and should not be interpreted in a narrow or parochial manner.

Hence we might have thought that those histories which focus on the nineteenth-century colonies would contain numerous references to other British possessions, including those in Canada. This is not the case. In fact, references to other colonies like those in Canada and India are few and far between and, apart from the chapters devoted specifically to the reasons for the establishment of the New South Wales colony, most contributions view the imperial connection,

if they view it at all, from the Australian end. Moreover, discussions of Australia's relations with the rest of the empire and the world become more frequent in the volumes or chapters dealing with the twentieth century.

For the record, there are references to Canada in the last three volumes—"1888," "1938," and "From 1939"—of *Australians*. Although they don't appear in the index, there are two references in 1888, both in the second to last chapter on "The Imperial Connection." The first relates to the calls for an "all-red" cable connection to Australia via the Canadian Pacific route and Victoria (B.C.) in place of the one across the Indian Ocean (p. 405); the second records the fact that there was a Canadian ship in Sydney at the time of the celebrations of the centenary of white settlement on January 26, 1888 (p. 416). There are two references to Canada in the index of the volume on 1938, both appearing in the final selection on "The World." The first refers to the fact that Canada would not accept Jewish refugees from Hitler's Europe as it had a policy of not accepting refugees while unemployment existed (p. 410); the other notes that some Australians going overseas followed the "all-red" route across the Pacific and through Canada (p. 439). In "From 1939" there is a 150 percent increase in mentions in the index to five. The first occurs in Chapter 2 on foreign policy, noting the creation of intelligence-sharing arrangements between Australia, Canada, Britain, and the USA after World War II; the second notes that Canada lowered its trade tariffs in the same period (p. 259); the third, in the same chapter on "boom and recession," points out that in the late 1970s the degree of foreign control of Australian industry was second only to Canada among the major industrial nations (p. 269); the fourth notes that Canada, Italy, and Finland usually have lost more days per worker due to strikes than Australia (p. 289); and the final reference is in the reminiscences of a mining magnate who comments that he met his bride on a ship to Canada after completing his Rhodes Scholarship at Oxford (p. 402).

The only reference to Canada in *The People's History* occurs in Volume Three, "Constructing a Culture," in a chapter entitled "The hidden influence of sport." The author is trying to explain why sporting success plays such an important role in the Australian psyche and, having dismissed the view that it stems from the fact that we have little else to brag about, he discounts the possibility that it might be because sport symbolizes the physical conquering of a harsh land with the improbable assertion that Canada has not taken a similar route. In case you are wondering what the answer is, he doesn't know, although he notes that the most enduring explanation is that sport is the one occupation through which social mobility based upon skill has been possible (p. 131)!

In sum, then, we can say that the bicentennial histories are social histories insofar as they tend to focus on the lives of ordinary people and themes from everyday life. These themes include the relatively systematic examination of the history of Australian children and the relationship between class, gender, and schooling. The concepts of class used in *Australians* are drawn variously from stratification and class theory and differ from chapter to chapter and volume to

volume according to the predilections of the authors and editors. The authors in *The People's History* are more consistent in their analyses of class, drawing on various forms of marxist-inspired antagonistic power relations. In both histories, class occupies a more privileged explanatory position than gender in the analysis and feminist theories of the importance of the sexual division of labour and patriarchal relations are not drawn on very often, particularly in *Australians*. Finally, the analysis of the role of the state tends to be narrowly focused on Australia and, when the importance of the British imperial state is explored, there is little evidence that its impact on colonial societies takes account of the comparative context.

These generalizations (or shortcomings) in the bicentennial histories can equally be applied to the recent historiography of the rise of mass schooling in the nineteenth century. In the 1980s, historians of education in Australia, Canada, and elsewhere, like the historians writing in the Australian bicentennial histories, have been greatly influenced by the "new social history" in their explorations of schooling and everyday life (as Donald Wilson points out in his review of Canadian historiography in *History of Education Review*).² Our writings reflect the impact of revisionists in the 1970s and feminist historians in the 1980s insofar as we usually acknowledge the importance of class and, to a lesser extent, gender relations in the formation of school systems. As well, in Canada and the USA, historians of education are beginning to explore more systematically the relationship between ethnicity, race, and schooling. Yet the analysis of class and education remains problematical for many of us and, in our haste to beat a retreat from the relatively crude social control theories of the 1970s, we have not taken account of the more sophisticated reworkings of class theory such as David Hogan's argument about school reform and class formation or Bob Connell's theory of class as practice. Many of us have been even less inclined to accept the importance of gender relations in the formation and reformation of school systems despite the superb analyses of historians like Alison Prentice and Marjorie Theobald. Even those of us more inclined towards radical interpretations have had difficulty acknowledging the often contradictory tensions between class and gender relations.

Perhaps even more importantly, although we often note similar developments in other societies and the international trade in ideas, we have hardly begun to investigate the role of the colonial state in the development of school systems despite Bruce Curtis' provocative argument in *Theory & Society* a few years ago.³

We haven't really begun to explore the possibility that the social forces at work in, for example, Victoria and Ontario which result in the establishment of relatively similar school systems in the same decade may derive from the construction of an increasingly international division of labour which impinges on class and gender relations and state formation in geographically remote areas. As in the 1970s, in the search for the particular forces at work, historians of education still tend to confine their analyses of capitalist development or patriarchal relations within the straight lines of our colonial, state, or national borders.

Nevertheless, in recent years there have been significant developments in our understanding of the origins of school systems as theoretically inclined historians and sociologists have begun to rework the arguments of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Not surprisingly, many of these scholars are working on pre-industrial capitalist societies like the British colonies in Canada and Australia because, as I suggested in the introduction, revisionist and neo-marxist explanations of the relationship between the rise of schooling and industrial capitalism were of limited use in the analysis of predominantly agricultural societies. It is also not surprising that these scholars have drawn on recent developments in feminist theory and post-structuralist critiques in their analyses as these two areas of theoretical development have provided the major challenges in the 1980s to the seeming certainties of neo-marxist reproduction theory in the 1970s. In the limited space available, I want to mention two of these works—one from South Australia and one from Ontario.

Pavla Miller's *Long Division: State Schooling and Society in South Australia* (Wakefield Press, 1986) is not a celebratory history even though it was published in the state's sesquicentennial year by the press set up specifically to provide a publishing outlet for South Australian books in 1986. It is, though, a landmark in Australian and, I believe, the international historiography of mass schooling as, along with the work of June Purvis in England and Alison Prentice and others in Canada, it attempts to provide an account of the rise of state schooling which focuses on the transformation of gender as well as class relations. In *Long Division*, Pavla (a marxist by birth, training, and inclination) has reworked her Ph.D. thesis on capitalism and state schooling in South Australia to incorporate feminist critiques of the inadequacy of marxist theories of the formation of gender relations in capitalist societies. Throughout her analysis, she has explored the impact of the sexual division of labour and patriarchal relations on the development of the institutional forms of schooling, the content of the curriculum, and the implications of gender inequities in the experience of schooling for South Australia's social development. I don't want to suggest that Pavla's treatment of these issues is necessarily novel as a number of feminist historians of education in Australia and elsewhere have explored aspects of them in considerable detail, focussing particularly on the relationship between the domestic ideology and educational reform in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. What makes *Long Division* relatively unique in the literature is its systematic attention to the interconnections between class and gender relations in an account which spans the history of white settlement from its beginnings to the present day.

Having lavished praise on my collaborator's book, I would also like to suggest that it represents the culmination of a particular historiographic era rather than the beginning of a new one. It is probably the best marxist feminist account of the history of schooling we have but I think that the analysis subordinates gender to class and cannot easily accommodate the more recent feminist critiques which stress the often contradictory dynamics between capitalism and patriarchy and the concomitant need to acknowledge that gender relations are as powerful,

if not more powerful, than class relations in the structuring of social forms. As well, *Long Division* is largely untouched by the post-structuralist critiques of French theorists like Foucault and Donzelot and, while I have considerable reservations about their utility, it seems certain that future analyses of the history of schooling must take account of their insights.

It is somewhat strange that English-speaking historians of education have been rather slow to make use of Foucault and Donzelot, as the two most relevant texts, *Discipline and Punish* and *The Policing of Families*, have been available in translation since the late 1970s. There have been exceptions, of course, like David Reeder in England, but the first systematic attempts to apply Foucault to the history of Australian education have only appeared in the last two years. This may be partly explained by the opaqueness of the language (in translation, at least) and the complexity of the theory. In the case of the Adelaide research group, though, with its interests in marxist and feminist theory, our reluctance has stemmed from Foucault's ambivalence about class analysis and his almost complete blindness regarding gender relations. I remain sceptical about the efficacy of adopting it in an unreflective manner. Nevertheless, it is now obvious that, used judiciously, Foucault can help provide important new ways of reconfiguring the origins of mass schooling. The clearest example of this is to be found in Bruce Curtis' brilliant book, *Building the Educational State: Canada West, 1836-1871* (Falmer & The Althouse Press, 1988) which is destined to become a classic work for all historians of education. Curtis' educational state is built on a very sophisticated understanding of marxism and the theory of state formation, topped by a Foucaultian superstructure and held together by the bricks and mortar of a detailed rereading of archival sources. I find his general argument about the role of state education in the construction of bourgeois hegemony very persuasive: "Educational practice," he suggests, "was centrally concerned with political self-making, subjectification and subordination; with anchoring the conditions of political governance in the selves of the governed; with the transformation of rule into a popular psychology" (pp. 14-15). At the same time, his reworking of the debates about particular aspects of nineteenth-century educational reform in Ontario such as school attendance (which, naturally, was of special interest to me) is enormously stimulating and the final chapter on "Pedagogy, Punishment and Popular Resistance" breaks new ground. Reading it, I found myself underlining passages and scribbling in the margins more often than with any other book I have read in years. Still, I have some reservations. Not surprisingly, my major concern with Bruce's argument involves the inadequate treatment of patriarchy and gender relations. This is not to say that *Building the Educational State* is insensitive to gender relations like Foucault. It isn't and, in fact, it is full of insights into the construction of forms of masculinity and femininity. Rather, it is to assert that the book focusses primarily on class processes and to suggest that building the educational state in the nineteenth century involved the establishment of new forms of governance of patriarchal relations as much as class relations.

This brings me to the argument about the protracted crisis in patriarchy which I alluded to at the beginning of the essay. Essentially, Pavla Miller and I suggest that the transition from feudalism in Europe and subsistence farming in the colonies to mature forms of capitalism is accompanied by an extended crisis in patriarchal relations which reverberates through all levels of society and shakes the foundations of governance in all social institutions including the state, the church, and the family. Initially, it involves a challenge to patriarchal age relations, which is not to suggest that age relations are not gendered but rather to emphasize that the crisis focusses on the rule of the father, not the husband. The struggle for control of the political state, involving the debate between the patriarchalists and social contract theorists and the eventual overthrow of the rule of kings and the triumph of bourgeois liberalism and democracy, is well-known. The obvious fact that this triumph was a triumph for men, for brothers, is also increasingly acknowledged now that feminists have focussed our attention on "fraternity" as well as "liberty" and "equality." We also know that this political struggle was accompanied by ferment in the other site of patriarchal power, the church, spawning more egalitarian forms of religion throughout the period. More importantly for our purposes, we now know, through the work of David Levine, Hans Medick, and others, that the crisis in age relations associated with the early stages of capitalism reached into the households of farming patriarchs as the sons, no longer dependent on access to land for their livelihood, could leave to establish their own families without the patriarch's consent. Moreover, insofar as the family wage in proto-industrial households was generated by the combined labour of the husband, wife, and children, the crisis intensified, as the household head's authority was conditional, particularly in relation to his children who, following his own example, could withdraw their labour when they reached "adulthood" and establish their own households without his consent. In colonial areas like Canada and Australia patriarchal authority was always more tenuous as the availability of land "further out" weakened the father's hold on the children's labour for the family farm. The transition from subsistence to capitalist forms of farming and industry was also much quicker in most areas as settlement coincided with the rapid expansion of British economic imperialism and farmers were soon drawn into the cash economy of the international commodity market.

If the crisis in the governance of age relations deepened in the eighteenth century with the rapid growth in capitalist wage relations, it was exacerbated by the challenge to patriarchal gender relations which gathered momentum in the later years of that century. The battle to extend the newly ascendant bourgeois notions of individualism and citizenship to middle-class women was coterminous with a similar struggle in working-class households associated with the individuation of the wage form and the beginnings of the separation of home and work during the transition to manufacturing capitalism. There are two important things to note about the resolution of this crisis in patriarchy in the nineteenth century. The first is the fusion of age and gender relations through the exclusion of women and children from the world of commerce and industry and the creation

of separate spheres for both—the domestic world for women, centering on mothering and the management of the household, and the world of childhood and schooling for juveniles, involving the new concept of the school-age child. Both spheres, of course, were dependent on the household head and subject to his authority. The second point is that the resolution of the crisis occurred much earlier in middle-class households. The resolution of working-class patriarchal relations had to weather the storm of early capitalism's appetite for women and children's labour and the resultant struggle over the wage form. Working-class patriarchy was only stabilized (to borrow Wally Seccombe's term) after the struggle for the male breadwinner's wage was won and notions of proletarian male respectability, associated with the dependent wife and child, were realized in the late nineteenth century.

What I want to suggest from this potted history of patriarchy is that the history of schooling can only be understood if we take account of the dual crisis in age and gender relations. For the middle class, the gendered nature of patriarchal relations remained paramount at least until the struggles over access to political rights and higher education in the late nineteenth century and, remembering Sophie's as well as Emile's educational program, the institutional forms developed to educate their children in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries reflected these separate spheres. For the great mass of the people, though, whether they lived in Britain, Europe, Canada, or Australia, the patriarchal crisis induced by the development of capitalist wage labour relations was more complex, and more complex to govern. Fundamentally, it was the crisis in obedience in age relations within farming and proletarian families and their increasingly democratic religious temper which spurred the traditional bastions of patriarchy, the churches, to explore new forms of governance of children. In the nineteenth century, the newly established bourgeois state intervened in the struggles over the wage form on the side of its increasingly enfranchised proletarian brothers, sweeping women and children from the labour market and into their spheres of domesticity and school-aged childhood.

This is not the whole story, of course, although I hope it provides a glimpse of the importance of incorporating a more thorough analysis of age and gender patriarchal relations into our accounts of the origins of mass schooling. As it stands, we know quite a lot about the relationship between schooling and patriarchy at the time of the denouement of the crisis early this century. Feminist historians of education have carefully investigated the reconstruction of the age-specific but largely gender-undifferentiated three R's elementary curriculum along gender-specific lines when the war for the male breadwinner's wage form was nearly won but the battle for women's acceptance as citizens in the patriarchal state was hotting up. I believe we need to know more about its beginnings.

In conclusion, I would like to make two quick points. The first is to reassure the sceptical that our exploration of the crisis in patriarchal relations is not another re-run of the crude social control theories of the 1970s in which we substitute gender and age for class domination. The second is a more ironic comment. It

was customary in the heady days of revisionism in the 1970s to ridicule the focus on the relationship between church and state of the more conventional historians of the origins of mass schooling. Now, I think that it is possible to argue that, refracted through the classed and gendered lenses of a decade of debate about schooling and capitalism and patriarchy, they were right in choosing the objects of their analysis—even if they asked the wrong questions.

NOTES

1. Ian Davey, "Capitalism, patriarchy and the origins of mass schooling," *History of Education Review*, 16, 2 (1987): 1-12.
2. J. Donald Wilson, "From Social Control to Family Strategies: Some Observations on Recent Trends in Canadian Educational History," *History of Education Review* 13, 1 (1984): 1-13.
3. Bruce Curtis, "Capitalist Development and Educational Reform: Comparative Material From England, Ireland and Upper Canada to 1850," *Theory and Society* 13 (1984): 41-68.