

Letter From England

by *Christie Davies*

Our Shortsighted Rulers



Laser beam surgery has now made it possible to correct many common eye defects caused by irregularities in the shape of the lens of the eye relative to the size of the eyeball. For those with severely impaired eyesight, this means a welcome escape from a serious handicap. However, for children who are only mildly shortsighted, the operation could cause problems as well as benefits, for myopia is a source of success and social mobility. Some have argued that there is a correlation between myopia and innate intelligence, which are simultaneously caused by two related patterns of genes. It has even been suggested that the manifest success of spectacle-wearing peoples such as the Japanese and the Jews and the relative failure of members of ethnic groups with good eyesight merely reflects this correlation. Whether this hypothesis is true or not may never be determined, for it is far too politically incorrect a theory to receive the research funding necessary to test it.

Rather, it is generally assumed by those who hold power in the health, education, and welfare bureaucracies that the link is an environmental one. For most of human history the myopic were failures and doomed to the early death that was the fate of those who could not see a charging mammoth, an enraged hippo or a horde of scimitar-waving Mamelukes until it was too late. In the modern world, by contrast, success goes to those who concentrate all their attention on objects next to their noses—a computer screen, a microscope, a balance sheet, or a legal loophole. That the world beyond is a blurred penumbra visible only through a lens of glass or plastic is a very real advantage, for it cuts out the distractions of sport, sex, and scenery that lead most of us astray. For the perfect-sighted, the publicity given to the rise of the myopic has confirmed their worst secret fear: that old four-eyes, the squat-faced swot, whom they hated

at school, really has overtaken them.

For the lower classes myopia and the wearing of spectacles assist those who are reasonably intelligent to rise in the world through entrepreneurship or education because they decisively block off such queer routes to mobility as football, crime, the entertainment industry, or marriage to a rich spouse. Men never make passes at girls who wear glasses, nor do pebble-lensed football players masquerading as stars. Since the chances of any particular lower-class individual making it to the top through male agility or female beauty are very small indeed, those who know from an early age that they are shortsighted and unsightly are saved from a dangerous delusion and are motivated to seek more reliable ways of bettering themselves. Shortsightedness breeds farsightedness while those who dreamed of stardom end up where they began, at the bottom of the heap.

The discovery of the link between myopia and success has created deep ideological divisions among socialists comparable to those that led to the collapse of the Labor government in 1951, when Harold Wilson and Nye Bevan resigned over the crucial issue of whether the state should provide free eyeglasses and false teeth as part of the National Health Service. The cabinet decided that there was no such thing as a free lunch, but its left wing disagreed, and the government collapsed and then lost the ensuing general election. In other countries politics is spectacle; in Britain spectacles are politics.

The old guard of the British left still proclaim that everyone has the right to perfect eyesight, if not better, and wants eyeglasses, contact lenses, and laser surgery to be provided free by the state. The revisionists, however, feel that it is wrong to deprive myopic lower-class children of a defect that would enable them to rise in the world. Accordingly they argue that spectacles in the good old-fashioned National Health Service frames (you can have any shape you like provided it is round) should be free to all, but that the laser beam correction of myopia should be left to private medicine, which the poor can't afford. The vanity of the rich will ensure that their children's poor eyesight, like their crooked teeth, will be operated on, regardless of

cost, but an unintended consequence of this will be the loss of an important part of their good start in life. Somewhere below them the bespectacled sons and daughters of menials will be steadily climbing up the ladder while they fall down the snake. For those radical socialists who believe in massive positive discrimination, even this is not enough. Equality demands a radical redistribution of myopia in a way that favors those disadvantaged by social class, race, ethnicity, sexual preference, or stupidity: they have a right to shortsightedness that must be provided by the state for those not so favored by nature. If laser surgery can cure myopia, it can also create it. In this way, they argue, bourgeois concepts of health can be subordinated to the higher goal of social equality, much as has long been true of education, welfare, and religion. In the coming socialist utopia, visible only to those with the correct radical astigmatism, myopia, like abortion or the removal of unsightly tattoos, will be not only a medical right but a social necessity.

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Letter From Zanesville

by *Jeffrey Michael Kane*

Stupid but Secure



Last year, the Board of Education for the Zanesville, Ohio, City School District was handed a hammer capable of striking a blow for the forces of good in the battle over the direction of public education. Unfortunately for this community, the board dropped the sledge squarely on its foot, seeking immediate relief by planting the appendage squarely in its collective mouth.

The issue involved an attempt to increase the minimum academic standards that students must meet before partic-

icipating in athletics or other extracurricular activities. To her credit, board member McFerren deemed the current standard—at least a cumulative “D” average before the start of the academic quarter—insufficient to warrant a pupil’s participation. Under the terms of her proposal, this cumulative standard would be raised one letter-grade, to a “C” average, and the student’s performance in each class would be monitored weekly during the quarter of participation. The student’s eligibility for participation in the activities of the subsequent week (team meetings, practices, and games) would be contingent upon the maintenance of a “C” in each class. *Below average* performance in any subject, according to her plan, would require the student to sit it out until these minimum standards were once again met.

Pretty reasonable, I think. The more benighted members of the board, however, thought otherwise. Despite overwhelming public and parental acceptance, the board voted instead to maintain the lowest possible standards allowed by the state. In an attempt to jettison academic principle for the more popular cargo of equity, board member Grosshandler served up this grammatical gem: “[Stricter standards] would not be fair to students who genuinely try and whose main reasons for attending schools was [sic] to play sports.”

This refusal to implement higher standards merely reflects the wholesale shift away from objective, quantifiable measures of student—and, by extension, teacher—performance. In the absence of such measures of their ability and conduct, the educrats can issue rosy public statements that effectively deny the reality of an *incompetence* that has become endemic to public education. Consider the unremitting outcry from the Ohio Education Association to the state mandate requiring all high-school students to pass a standardized *ninth-grade* proficiency examination (PE) as a condition of graduation. “Unfair,” “insensitive,” “racist,” it wailed. “Regressive,” it whined. Indeed, it is unfair, regressive, and insensitive. It is unfair to employers seeking competent high school graduates to have an applicant pool whose communication and clerical skills are scarcely beyond that of an eighth-grader. It is unfair to colleges and universities, which must design and fund remedial way stations to elevate the mathematical and grammatical competency of these

youngsters to the 12th-grade level. It is regressive because it imposes upon the market increased prices due to added production costs in the form of training and reeducation of workers, which often involve teaching them how to read. Finally, it is insensitive not only to employers, collegians, and consumers but to the student population, which is receiving the short end of the education stick.

Yet to the educrats, it is unfair because it demands accountability. The scandalously high number of students who fail the PE on their first try can easily be blamed on incompetent instruction. The inability of several thousand students to pass it after a second or third sitting can be blamed on poor curriculum content and design. Educators used to shift accountability for their pathetic instruction through grade inflation and the elimination of the “F” and all other marks indicating “failure.” If, in a class of 30 students, 25 received A’s and B’s, the teacher must be pretty good. Put an apple on his desk and dōle out part of that union-guaranteed annual pay increase. But the PE cut him off on the way to the bank. If those 25 students achieved marks of “B” or better in his English composition class, then presumably they should breeze through the verbal portion of the PE. But on average, 40 percent of these 25 did not. As a result, the obvious question emerged: How can a student receive an “A” in senior English and subsequently fail the verbal half of a ninth-grade proficiency test?

But he can if the school system lacks money, said the education establishment. Enlisting their conventional justification for any problem plaguing their realm, they enlightened us to the fact that such pathetic test results were the product not of a lack of instruction, but of a lack of resources, most of them financial. What followed was a torrent of emergency funding initiatives and ballot measures designed to raise the cash necessary to bolster up the PE scores. Overnight, signboards reading “Levy or Armageddon . . . You Decide!” sprouted on the lawn of every teacher in the district, followed closely by appeals to “Save the Kids.” Yet they saved the best for last. In what will long be remembered as the most outrageous piece of showmanship in the history of public education, those Ohio school districts boasting the poorest performance on the PE filed suit, with the assistance of the farcical ad

hoc Coalition for Equity and Adequacy in School Funding (CEASF), against the state of Ohio for, among other things, the “necessary [money] to provide students [of these districts] academic realities which [sic] translate more readily with those of students from districts facing less challenges.”

Such solicitations, of course, are nothing new. Over the past four decades, educrats have perfidiously convinced American parents and legislators that any hiccup in public education could be cured with additional funding. From 1950-1989, despite hundreds of studies showing absolutely no correlation between spending and educational achievement, average per-pupil expenditures rose in real terms from \$1,333 to \$4,931. This fourfold increase in real spending, however, has brought no academic improvement, but significant decline. Indeed, from 1963 to 1990, combined SAT scores fell on average 95 points from 980 to 885. Over this same period, statisticians have labored furiously to build subfloor after subfloor to accommodate American students in the academic performance house of industrialized nations. In an international study conducted last year by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, only 20 percent of American college teachers surveyed felt that American schools had adequately prepared college enrollees in writing and speaking skills, while a mere 15 percent saw adequate preparation in math and quantitative reasoning, results which placed Americans last among the field of 14 countries. Curiously, across the street in the financial house of industrialized nations, where one’s digs are based on the average per-pupil expenditure for education, the American kids are in the penthouse and swimming on the roof.

Fortunately, such evidence does not appear to have been wasted on the voters, whose patience with the “inadequate funding” argument is wearing thin. Since November 1993, Ohio voters have rejected eight of the ten balloted school tax levies, increases, or renewals—some failing by as much as 40 percentage points. This response is tantamount to a referendum against throwing good money after bad or rewarding nonperformance. Casting further light on this shifting sentiment has been an exponential increase in the incidence of “bright flight”—the transfer of the most intelligent (and often the most mon-

eyed) students to more effective districts.

Consequently, the educrats have been scrambling to their last line of defense: depreciate the results and significance of specific testing instruments, such as the SAT and PE, and objective, quantitative grading systems in general. The general name for this is OBE, "Outcome-Based Education," which seeks to dispense with Carnegie curriculum units altogether and institute in their place vague "new basics" based on a mishmash of "learning outcomes" defined and established by the educrats themselves. Rather than mathematics, science, and language arts, the euphemistic buzzwords of this paradigm are "fairness," "diversity," "self-esteem," "confidence," "sensitivity," and "emergence." How a child writes or what he writes is far less important than how he *feels* about how or what he writes. Next to literacy in the museum of public education is historical scholarship, which is being revised and contorted so as not to exclude or offend any hyphenated sub-classification of humans, plants, or animals. For example, I have learned that Africa was the cradle of math and engineering, that a sub-Saharan black discovered America, and that Negro soldiers single-handedly liberated the German concentration camps in World War II. The verity of such feats, let alone their difficult reconciliation with the present state of the Dark Continent, is of little importance provided they play well to the group they seek to assuage and serve to discredit the contributions of less-hyphenated peoples, particularly white European males.

All this in the name of "fairness" and "self-confidence." In reality, it is in the name of job security. In the marketplace, shoddy work and poor product quality generally result in the elimination of the producer and its products. But the education establishment is not the marketplace.

Incidentally, I have received complaints about one of my workers napping on the job—sometimes napping for two to three hours at a time. A supervisor has suggested that I codify more austere policies against such nonperformance. After much thought, I have decided that stricter standards would be unfair to employees who genuinely try, and whose main reason for coming to work is to catch up on their sleep.

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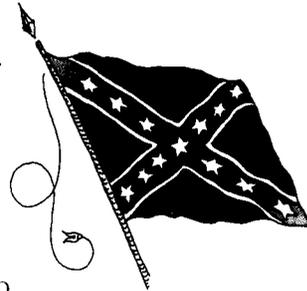
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ART

The Art of Adolf Hitler

by Mark Warren

In reading the Charles Manson story, *Helter Skelter*, I was struck by a brief passage about Manson's admiration for Hitler. Manson believed he had things in common with Hitler, and there were similarities in their lives, however trivial: both were vegetarians; both had an incredible ability to influence others; and both were frustrated, rejected artists.

Hitler—a frustrated, rejected artist? What was this all about? I had long heard that Hitler was a housepainter, though William Shirer claims “there is no evidence that he ever followed such a trade.” And I knew that, in 1907, when he was 18 years old, Hitler had been rejected for admission by the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts, and that he had been rejected again in 1908. The burning question for me was “Why was he rejected?” According to Hitler in *Mein Kampf*, his rejection came as a blow, a shocking mistake, because he was so certain the academy would accept him. He claims that he was dissatisfied with himself for the first time in his life.

But where was information about Hitler's art—locations, catalogues, reproductions? Local universities had nothing to offer, but I found exactly what I needed buried in a big-city public library: a treasure-trove of 260 pages of Hitler's art, some in black-and-white reproductions, some in color. This book, cataloguing hundreds of sketches, drawings, and paintings by Hitler, was a stunning revelation to me. Most interesting were several examples of paintings that Hitler had submitted to the academy in 1907, as well as several drawings, two of which received a grade of “good.” Much

of Hitler's art, as this book makes clear, is today in private collections not open to the public.

This discovery fired my interest further. It was apparent to me, as an artist, that Hitler had talent. His artistic skill, in my opinion, was sufficient for entrance to the Vienna Academy, and other art authorities have concluded that he should not have been rejected. The work he produced between 1908 and 1914 was more revealing still; that work showed a marked improvement in his art. During his Vienna years, a number of dealers even sold his work.

Growing frustration tinged with anger and disappointment with the course of his life in Vienna apparently caused Hitler to seek an escape from his trials. His interest shifted from art to reading, which he took up avidly, focusing on politics, Austrian history, and the plight of the dispossessed. He began to hate Vienna and to attribute his own artistic problems and all the social and economic problems in Austria to the influence of the Jews, as he admitted in *Mein Kampf*. Before the Vienna years, there is little evidence that Hitler particularly hated Jews. Anti-Semitism was not an issue in the environments where he grew up. His mother's doctor was a Jew, and Hitler is not on record as hating the Jewish art dealers in Vienna who sold his work. But his hatred of Jews was clearly established by the end of his years in Vienna. He blamed them for his failures, and particularly for his failed art career, but were the academy's administrators and faculty really Jewish? I thought this worthy of investigation.

I tried to learn more about Hitler's rejection by the academy. What was the Jewish connection there, if any? I wrote to the director of Vienna's *Kunst-historisches Museum* and asked outright if the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts, in 1907, had Jewish teachers and a Jewish administration. Surprisingly, the academy still existed, and the director stated that “obviously” there had been teachers of the Mosaic faith. He suggested that I write to the academy for more detailed information. I wrote, but I received no answer. This only height-

ened my interest.

Most biographers claim that Hitler was a lazy, poor student who showed little ambition or sense of purpose. Actually, he did well in lower school—and well in upper school in what interested him. The tools he had to become a successful artist—talent, perseverance, determination, and energy—were all for the good, but these same tools became evil in the Vienna years.

Art was on Hitler's mind his entire life. He drew and sketched incessantly. He supervised the design of all the new structures he built and planned to build. Albert Speer headed Hitler's team of architects, and he attests to Hitler's skill in the conception and design of the New Germany's architecture. Many of these sketches and drawings still exist. Art was on Hitler's mind when he strove, after becoming chancellor in 1933, to rid Germany and Austria of the modernist painters and their art, all of which was eventually removed from museums. The artists lost their teaching jobs. Some fled Europe, some went to jail. The great Ludwig Kirchner committed suicide. Hitler built the House of German Art in Munich, based on his idea of what art should be. His lifelong project was to eliminate Vienna as the prime art center in Austria, and to this end he decided to make Linz, his home, the greatest art center in the world. Art remained on Hitler's mind all through the war. In his *Table Talk*, a record of mealtime conversations from 1941 to 1944, a good number of his discussions were about artists, all forms of art, and plans for the cultural New Germany. Werner Maser, his biographer, tells how in March 1945, four weeks before he died, he was engaged in a wooden model of Linz that incorporated his ideas.

Hitler frequently deplored his life, expressing his dearest wish to wander through Italy as an unknown painter. He often quoted Nero's dying words, “What an artist dies in me.” While speaking to Carl Burckhardt about destroying Poland, he paused and stated how glad he would be if he could stay there and work as an artist.

Werner Maser devoted part of one