

On Our Children and Their Education

Written by Helen and Mark Hegener, as published in The Voluntaryist, October 1992.

None of the calls to environmental action ever go quite far enough. Unless some very real, very lasting changes are made, and soon, it won't matter much whether or not we've saved the whales, or the spotted owls, or the forests. We will have lost something much more dear and precious to us all: Our children.

While most of today's best and brightest are thinking up new ways to save the planet, their children are being indoctrinated by the government public school system. Make no mistake about indoctrination: in *The Night is Dark and I am Far From Home* (1990) Jonathan Kozol wrote, "The first goal and primary function of the US public school is not to educate good people, but good citizens. It is the function which we call—in enemy nations—'state indoctrination.'"

Schools are places where children learn how to submit to authority, to bury their yearnings for free expression and to submit to regimentation and disciplined monotony. Substantive questioning of authority is discouraged. This process often entails the outright destruction of a child's intellectual capabilities; people who know too much are not likely to be submissive and willing to conform when it goes against reason and common sense, as much of what happens in school does. Knowledge is power, and those who hold the power are not always willing to share all of the knowledge.

So why do we continue in this mad headlong rush? Because we, as a society, have been led to believe that schools, whether public schools, traditional private schools, or alternative schools in their many forms, are necessary to the learning process. In fact, they are only necessary to the social and political process.

We fully expect this battle to be twice as difficult as the battle to save the environment, because it's extremely difficult to convince most people that there's really anything wrong. People have an overriding attitude which says "School was good enough for me, and it's good enough for my kids, too."

In his book *Freedom and Beyond* (1972), the author and educator John Holt put his finger on a significant piece of the problem when he wrote, "A large part of our problem is that few of us really believe in freedom. As a slogan, it is fine. But we don't understand it as a process or mechanism with which or within which people can work or live. We have had in our own lives so little experience of freedom, except in the most trivial situations, that we can hardly imagine how it might work."

We've raised five children and none of them has ever gone to school. They are all bright, intelligent, fun to be around, and determined to chart their own course through life. They won't wait to be told what to do, or what they can do. We wish more children had the opportunity to grow up the way they did, to make decisions about their own lives, to make mistakes and to learn from them, to grow in their own ways instead of being processed and labeled and spit out the other end of the assembly line called school.

How to proceed? Simply publishing this letter, and giving people a chance to think about this, situation, will be an important first step. We intend to keep writing, and perhaps together we and others can make a difference. Thanks for whatever you can do to help.