

“All of Us Common People” and Education in the Depression

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One draconian proposal of the Great Depression in Canada involved the Kidd Report of British Columbia. Regarding education, the Report recommended closure of poorly attended rural schools, reduction in numbers of teachers and their salaries, increase in normal school fees, withdrawal of the university grant, and imposition of high school fees — issues entailing a critique of schooling and sharp controversy. The controversy vented a geyser of popular indignation, and of strongly held assumptions about schooling. Most powerful was the ingrained belief that education was a right which led to socio-economic advancement in a democracy. For Canadian life the school was seen as central. This perception suggests that the institution functioned as an outlet for insurrectionary impulses rife during the depression. Particularly important are these conclusions in light of recent educational historiography which has shunned “democratic” motivations and depreciated the role of schools in society.

La Crise économique de 1929 donna lieu au Canada à une proposition draconienne contenue dans le Rapport Kidd de la Colombie-Britannique. En matière d'éducation, le rapport recommandait en effet la fermeture des écoles de campagne où la clientèle était trop faible, la réduction du nombre d'enseignants et de leur salaire, le relèvement des frais de scolarité à l'école normale, la suppression de la subvention aux universités, et l'imposition de frais de scolarité à l'école secondaire, autant de recommandations qui comportaient une critique de l'école et qui soulevèrent une vive controverse. Cette controverse provoqua un tollé général et mit en évidence des convictions profondes au sujet de la scolarisation, la plus enracinée étant que l'éducation était un droit et un instrument de promotion sociale dans une démocratie. La scolarisation était perçue comme une nécessité par les Canadiens. Cette constatation semble suggérer que l'école constituait un exutoire pour les nombreuses incitations à l'insurrection durant la crise économique. Ces conclusions prennent une importance particulière à la lumière de l'historiographie récente en éducation qui écarte les motivations “démocratiques” et déprécie le rôle de l'école dans la société.

Historians often emphasize that the significance of an act, study, or report is to be found in its concrete and verifiable effects. If it has none, or few, it is sometimes seen as unimportant. Frequently, however, an occurrence with few direct results, or an action which fails to achieve its basic purpose, is significant because of its power to reveal things — relationships, attitudes, or group mentalities. One such occurrence in Canadian history concerned the Kidd Report of 1932 in British Columbia. As an attempt by big businessmen to curtail government expenditure through draconian retrenchments it was a monumental failure. Virtually all who

have considered the Report have thus seen it as a political instrument of little impact and less import.¹

What historians have missed is what the Report, or the fiery controversy over it, revealed about education in British Columbia, about the role of the school during the depression, about social class and school relationships in the province, and about the part the ideal of democracy played in the episode. Regarding democracy, recent radical educational historiography in general has been strangely silent. Stressing the malignant aspects of social control, racism, bureaucracy, and social class in schooling, its claim has been that earlier work overemphasized the significance of schools in providing equal opportunity, that school systems did not emerge as a response to some mysterious democratic impulse, and that democracy, indeed, has never really existed.² One important result of this downplaying of democracy has been a tendency to eschew discussions of the notion altogether. Allied to this tendency is the belief of many recent scholars that the school reflects rather than directs society, that it is impotent in changing the social structure, and that it is thus a weak institution whose social influence has been vastly overrated.

In response to these two trends this paper asserts that the recent "hands off" approach to the notion of democracy is ahistorical. Moreover, the place of school in society has sometimes been most central. It was this way during the Great Depression and the controversy over the Kidd Report.

I

The immediate pressure for the commissioning of the Kidd Report was brought to bear on Conservative Premier Simon Fraser Tolmie in late 1931 by Vancouver businessmen led by H. R. MacMillan, forestry magnate and vice-president of the Vancouver Board of Trade. On November 25, as Tolmie and his ministers mulled over wholesale retrenchments, MacMillan confided to the Premier that the "business community is ready to give their full support to the man who shows the courage to make prompt drastic reductions in public expenditures" (MacMillan, Note 1). Two weeks later, the Premier met with a committee of Vancouver businessmen headed by George Kidd, Vancouver securities and investment counsellor and former president of the B.C. Electric. The Premier opened the meeting saying that he was "glad to have a friendly committee." He then told Kidd that "the financial situation will be placed in your hands." "I would prefer to move along quietly," he said, "and . . . when we have accomplished something, let us decide whether we will publish it or not and how" (Tolmie, Note 2).

The businessmen, however, had intentions of being neither quiet nor controlled. Indeed, they planned to wrest control from a government in which they had lost faith. What they aspired to was a palace revolt, a

"conservative revolution," led by a big business oligarchy. That they were willing to undergo the public exposure of business class mentality and business class solutions was a measure of their frustration with the economic downturn and two successive governments which had under-represented Vancouver in cabinet, and their equation of business interests with provincial interests in general.

When Tolmie's cabinet hedged over the matter of supplying secret government documents, the businessmen intensified their pressure for a commission. In March 1932 they staged a huge lobby which swept the legislature. On the 23rd J. N. Harvey, chairman of the Service Clubs Council of Vancouver, informed Tolmie that Kidd had strong entrepreneurial backing (Harvey, Note 3). On the 24th the B.C. Fruit Growers' Association in Kelowna informed the Premier that it "fully endorses the action of the coast businessmen . . . asking for an independent financial committee . . ." (B.C. Fruit Growers', Note 4). On the 29th the Saanich Board of Trade added their voice to the call (Sladen, Note 5). On April 15, a letter signed by all the lower mainland business magnates requested the appointment of a commission of five from a group of eight (Vancouver Board of Trade, Note 6). The same day Tolmie acquiesced, appointing W. L. Macken, Chilliwack dairyman and lumberman, financier, and real estate agent; Austin Taylor, Vancouver financier, mine and oil executive; A. H. Douglas, Vancouver lawyer; R. W. Mayhew, Victoria manufacturer and Chamber of Commerce executive; and George Kidd.

In its deliberation the Committee was influenced by a tax revolt mentality and a conviction that the solution to all financial woes lay in curtailment of expenditure—that is, in the rigorous application of business principles to government. They took as their model the May Commission (1931) in England. That report recommended increased centralization, reduction in the number of authorities, large-scale retrenchment in education, fees for secondary pupils, elimination of state grants to universities, and the reduction of teacher salaries (May Committee, Note 7). Significantly, the Kidd Committee and its big business support combined a preference for oligarchy with a distrust of the party system. As Harold Brown, president of the Vancouver Board of Trade, said, "a small board of capable responsible directors is all we need . . ." (Parker, 1970, p. 110).

On July 12, 1932, the Committee presented its eagerly awaited Report to Premier Tolmie. The Report blamed party patronage for much of the province's difficulty and recommended, simply, a balanced budget without increased taxation. Drastic cutbacks were needed, it said, and these included: reduction of the civil service, closure of British Columbia House in London, curtailment of agricultural programs, merging the Departments of Agriculture, Mining, and Natural Resources, and the abolition of the Department of Fisheries. The Committee also recom-

mended that the Legislative Assembly be reduced from 48 to 28 members, that the operations of the Pacific Great Eastern Railway be discontinued, that all construction on new highways and buildings cease, and that the Minimum Wage Acts be repealed. Regarding education, the Committee urged that fees be implemented in the high schools, poorly attended rural schools be closed, the number of teachers and their salaries be reduced, fees for normal schools be raised, and the university grant be withdrawn. To enact these recommendations the Commission suggested that the Assembly be summoned immediately and that Liberals and Conservatives form a coalition to confront the province's perilous situation. The Report concluded:

We are of opinion that the time has come for a complete change in the ideas, opinions, and motives which have influenced both the electors and the elected in the past. Patronage and self-interest have been allowed to control the affairs of government and the public purse has been regarded as an inexhaustible booty upon which all may prey. (Kidd, 1932, p. 54)

II

Although the Committee examined many government activities, by far the greatest public response occurred in the area of education. Here the Report's recommendations were both supported and opposed. The support took the form of a critique of British Columbian education. The Report's advocates questioned whether post-elementary education was worth the expense, whether it met students' career needs, whether it was equitably financed, and whether expenditures on teachers were too great. Regarding post-secondary education Kidd doubted that the University of British Columbia could maintain academic excellence since the government could not afford to continue the annual grant. Regretting that "the education issue was allowed to becloud the main purpose of the Report," he suggested that it would be better "to keep one or two universities with high standards in Canada rather than five or six of low standard" ("Kidd Replies," Note 8).

Regarding secondary education, both the system of taxation and the school's utility in preparing individuals for economic life were criticized. School taxation, the *Victoria Times* noted, penalized those whose children did not attend.

In many cases parents are unable to allow their children to attend high school because they either require them to help out at home or start earning money so as to assist in the family expenses. This is especially the case in farming communities and to a considerable extent in cities also. . . . The result of the present system is that while a poor man's son is often unable, for the above reasons, to continue his education beyond the elementary schools, his parents have to go on paying school taxes to help pay for the education of the wealthier man's son at high school. ("Other Peoples," Note 9)

Even those who attended, opponents charged, were shortchanged. "For what does it profit a man to have knowledge of Greek roots," asked the *Vancouver Province*, "if he cannot get even a job digging stumps . . . ?" ("Cabinet's Reply," Note 10). Education beyond a certain stage in British Columbia, said Kidd, had little practical relevance, for the province was still "more or less on the frontier." The cost of education, moreover, was "being met on borrowed money" and it was "time to consider whether free education should be a matter of the three R's" ("Kidd Replies," Note 11). Commissioner Macken added: "With all our educational facilities — universities, schools and high grade teachers — where are we today, and how are we going to get out of our difficulties?" ("Macken Favors," Note 12).

Premier Tolmie too was critical. The school system and its educators, he felt, had become too cluttered with "formula, ritual, dogma and expense."

Today when a boy or girl reaches the age of 20, he has learned so little of what is necessary and that learning has cost so much, that there should be no surprise at a rebellion among parents and business. . . . Education has become so compartmented and departmentalized that there is no gathering it together, no finding out what it is all about, or the direction in which it is going. . . . No one can tell today just what education is. . . . Education with its pyramided expense is due for a severe overhauling. Teaching in many ways will have to be simplified and will have to give a perspective of our new world and youth's place in it. ("Tolmie," Note 13)

Expenditures on teachers were also scored. Members of the Committee charged that teachers had "punished" the taxpayers over the years with their substantially increased salaries. Accordingly they recommended a 25% cut in salaries as well as a staff reduction (Kidd, 1932, p. 36). "Unless you protest at the expense created by one of the strongest unions in the country — the teachers and the parent teachers — you will have nothing left," warned Kidd ("Stout Defense," Note 14). R. W. Mayhew, Victoria member of the Committee, continued the attack on teachers, suggesting that students be charged the full cost of attending normal school.

Law students put in seven years at their own expense . . . the practice in other professions. Why should teaching be singled out? . . . The schedule of teaching salaries, particularly in Victoria and Vancouver, is such that teachers in some cases are receiving more than doctors or dentists, who have to study for years at their own expense. ("Report Challenge," Note 15)

One must not conclude from the critique on education that business and other support for the Report was unified. Kidd and his associates struggled gamely to achieve a sense of solidarity. They spoke throughout the lower mainland and attended many panel discussions. Men like C. J. Stone, chairman of the Canada Credit Man's Trust Association, lauded the Committee for its "honest criticism" and rebuked the "armchair

communists who criticized the Report" ("Kidd Replies," Note 16). And the Vancouver Chamber of Commerce, the Committee's principal support, constantly lobbied on their behalf, pressuring the Victoria Chamber to support the recommendations and the provincial cabinet to implement them ("Balanced Budget," Note 17). Victoria businessmen, however, were not all agreed ("Unanimity," Note 18). Neither were their colleagues in the Saanich Conservative Association who considered the Report so "inconsistent" that they "condemned it as a whole" (Spurr, Note 19). Even the Canadian Manufacturers' Association urged the Report's economics only insofar as they were "practical and in the best interests of the province" ("Endorse," Note 20).

This inconsistent and half-hearted support was accompanied by tremendous popular antagonism. The Report's business bias, underlying assumptions, misleading and faulty analysis, and limited view of the purposes of education were all heavily attacked. Critics detected very early the business elite's ploy for power. The *British Columbia Clarion*, a Vancouver paper authorized by the Socialist Party of Canada, for example, condemned the Report as a blueprint for "an administrative dictatorship" (Note 21). Professor H. F. Angus of UBC emphatically denounced Kidd's proposals as "fascist" and warned that suggested changes in the provincial constitution were "dangerous" ("Economist Rakes," Note 22).

G. F. Drummond, UBC economics professor, disputed the assumption that government was analogous to business, since the former was concerned with rendering services to the whole community, while the latter was interested in making profits for a few. "That is why business men are the worst fitted to advise what to do during a depression," he asserted. "Business efficiency fires people and the government has to feed . . . them" ("B.C. Tax," Note 23). "Government is not a business proposition," agreed the *Victoria Times*. "Matters of public health, law and order, education, the protection of life and property, indeed the whole social order are things which cannot be envisioned in terms of money" ("Committee's Report," Note 24).

Angus and others also attacked the Committee's solid business composition. An investigation into public finance, he said, would "have to be considered by some more representative group than the Committee which represented employers but not labour, rich but not poor, men but not women" (Angus, 1932a, p. 21). Suggestions from such an unrepresentative group, claimed Colin McDonald, president of Vancouver, New Westminster and District Trades and Labour Council, "will in no way benefit the working class but are solely in the interest of the money lenders" (McDonald, Note 25). The Vancouver *Labour Statesman* agreed:

In the sacred name of economy we are to have a smaller legislature and a more compact cabinet. With larger constituencies and consequently greater

expense in connection with political campaigns no one but a rich man will be able to afford to become a candidate. Labor and socialist candidates will be practically barred except perhaps in the two larger cities and no member will possibly be able to keep in touch with his constituents, nor will they have significant contact with him. A coalition government is always the last desperate expedient of capitalism in decay and the smaller it is the easier it can be controlled by the plutocratic oligarchy which really governs this country. (Logie, Note 26)

The socialist paper colorfully anticipated the business bias of the Report:

It will quite ignore the real cause of our troubles and boldly proceed to knock a few twigs off the political tree, while at the same time the root is suffering from collar rot, senile decay, woolly aphids, San Jose scale, water core and everything else that roots normally have when the tree is dying. . . . It is evident to everyone that the situation here in British Columbia is becoming desperate and . . . the Report . . . will miss the real solution by about a million miles. Who in hell wants economy when any child knows that we produce too much and why advocate curtailing education and social services when half our income has to go to bond holders so that they have their pound of flesh. . . . (*Statesman*, Note 27)

The Report's analysis was attacked on the grounds that it blamed party government for everything, it was founded on a false parallel with the May Commission, its statistical documentation was misleading and deceptive, its grouping of education under social services was suspect, and its understanding of the purposes of education was limited. In the first place, the *Monetary Times*, a business paper published in Toronto whose Vancouver office was in the Stock Exchange Building, did not feel that the provincial government alone was responsible for British Columbia's sagging economy. Taking into account the long list of companies that were in financial difficulty, it postulated that overexpansion and mismanagement on the part of business also contributed to a worsening situation (*Monetary Times*, Note 28). "Businessmen," said Henry Angus, "have invested . . . and borrowed . . . too, in enterprises whose earning power has been estimated on the assumption that good years were normal years and that the world had sound monetary policies" (Angus, 1932b, p. 47).

The *BC Teacher*, organ of the B.C. Teachers' Federation, attacked Kidd's dubious parallel with the May Report:

Only in the single fact that they both made investigations into the financial situation of the governments is there a similarity. . . . In method of appointment, qualifications of the members for the task, basic principles upon which they made their recommendations, and finally the recommendations themselves, they are very dissimilar. The May Committee was appointed by the British Government on its own initiative and was made representative of different classes; the Kidd Committee was practically self-appointed . . . and it represented the business interests only. On the May Commission economic experts were included; on the Kidd Committee, not only were the members

not economists, but they did not even consult with economic experts which were available in the provincial university. ("The Federation," 1932, p. 3)

The Report's statistical documentation was also excoriated. The teachers claimed that the Committee's figures, which demonstrated a fivefold increase in educational costs from 1910-1931, were misleading because the Committee implied that the increased costs were unwarranted. Moreover, enrolment had increased substantially from 57,706 pupils in 1913 to 113,914 in 1931 and the cost per pupil per capita had declined (pp. 4-5). Professor Angus further dissected the deception surrounding the Committee's figures:

The Committee chose as the basis for their comparison the year 1910... which happens to be well suited for the effect that they wish to produce.... From then until 1913 education costs rose very fast. Indeed they more than doubled in this period.... Had 1913 been used as a base the increase by 1931 would have been a little more than two to one and not five to one. Then the Committee, without giving any reason for its procedure, compares the increase in the cost of education with the increase in population rather than with the increase in the number of children attending school.... As wealth increased parents would keep their children at school. Between 1913 and 1931 enrolment increased nearly twice as fast as the population. (Angus, Note 29)

The teachers disputed Kidd's classification of education with social services. Distinguishing education, which they considered an inalienable right, from social services, which were forms of compensation for economic and social disadvantages, the teachers sought to dissociate themselves from the latter, which inevitably were the first cut during times of retrenchment. "Education..." said the *BC Teacher*, "is a duty of the State that has been recognized as the very highest importance in all civilized communities for over a century. The other services are quite laudable and with them we are in principle, completely in accord, but education cannot by any stretch of the imagination be looked upon as being in the same category as the so-called 'social services'" ("The Federation," 1932, p. 4).

Perhaps the most serious criticism levelled on the Report was that it profoundly misunderstood the functions of education and that its recommendations thus threatened the fundamental aims of the school system. The Committee believed that the three Rs were sufficient for life in a frontier society and that the schools retained children too long, cost too much, and were too scholastic (Kidd, 1932, p. 34). Post-elementary education, it felt, was not needed for everyone. The Committee's critics contended that more than the rudiments were necessary to maintain British Columbia's economic development and international stature. Higher education, they said, implanted the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required by a rapidly changing modern society. Professor W. A. Carrothers of UBC dismissed Kidd's frontier mentality, stating "this is

more than a pick and shovel province." Men trained in engineering and technology, he said, were needed to develop the resources. If they were unavailable, "people from outside" would "assume the positions" ("Professor," Note 30). The Report's antagonists maintained that "we have . . . to have an intelligent race of people, and . . . to equip our children to take their place successfully in . . . a changing world" ("PTA," Note 31). British Columbia, warned the *Vernon News*, could not afford to "fall behind in an age of specialists" (Note 32). Post-elementary education provided the intelligence, specialization, and efficiency required to maintain "Canada's position among the nations of the world" ("1933 Convention," 1933, p. 8). "Efficiency is not something that can be left to chance," said the *BC Teacher*. "It is the product of . . . secondary education . . ." ("The Federation," 1932, pp. 6-7).

The secondary school was perceived by its supporters as the central institution for developing the "proper" attitudes of citizenship in a modern democracy, for the years between 14 and 18 were thought to be the most impressionable (*Vancouver Province*, Note 33). "Education seeks the orderly development of the innate capacities of the child with the idea not only of helping him to make a living, but of helping him to enjoy satisfaction and happiness in his life and to contribute to the satisfaction and happiness of his fellows . . .," said the *BC Teacher* ("The Federation," 1932, p. 5). "In classes in civics, in history, in literature, in languages, as well as in the general life of the school and playground, the child is conditioned for the life he will have to live as a member of a complex society," said the *Vancouver Province*. "If he misses his secondary education, he will miss a great deal that would have helped make him a better citizen" (Note 34). Free public education was absolutely necessary for the continued "development of Canadian democracy . . .," concluded a resolution to the 1933 Teachers' Convention ("1933 Convention," 1933, p. 8).

In short, the critics argued that broad educational and democratic aims were subverted by the Report. The specific recommendations further outlined that fact. Regarding rural education, the Report recommended that institutions whose attendance fell below 10 in the elementary schools and 15 in the high schools be closed, and that "the expenditure of Boards in rural school districts . . . be made subject to the control of the Education Department" (Kidd, 1932, p. 35). The rural population, however, viewed these recommendations as part of a broad assault by the coast on the interior. Even the Victoria branch of the Native Sons of Canada warned that such suggestions would alienate the interior. "The Report," it said, "will result in a further striving of sectionalism and controversy in our fair province and delay in the return of better times" ("Recommendations," Note 35). The *Penticton Herald* interpreted Kidd's findings as a "swat" against "the country districts" ("Kidd Report Overdone," Note 36). William Harrison, President of the B.C. Sheep Breed-

ers' Association, opposed the Report's suggestion to reduce grants to fairs. "There is nothing as important to the interior . . . as the small local fairs," he said. "Nowadays, the average boy on a farm is more interested in an automobile than anything else, and it is only when he enters exhibits in competition . . . that he develops interest in the farm's livestock, poultry and miscellaneous produce" ("Kidding Report," Note 37). The *Prince George Citizen* charged that the Report's recommendations "represent little more than a liquidator's method of balancing an account . . ." ("Kidd Findings," Note 38). The *Grand Forks Gazette* condemned the business oligarchy claiming that "they see things through the optics of those who seem to regard the interior of British Columbia as so much excess baggage. . . ." "The less affluent who make up the great bulk of the province," said the *Gazette*, "are entitled to a little consideration" ("Kidd Committee," Note 39).

Clearly Kidd's recommendations for centralizing school administration and for reducing the size of the legislature menaced local control over education and the interior's influence in provincial affairs. Closure of poorly attended rural schools threatened the quality of education and of rural citizenship. Since few would have been induced to settle where only limited educational facilities existed, Kidd's proposals also seemed sure to impair economic expansion ("Comments," Note 40).

Antagonism to the Report, however, peaked over the issue of high school fees. The Report recommended that:

Should a pupil wish to attend High School after the completion of his fourteenth year, he should only be permitted to do so on paying fees sufficient to cover 50 percent of the entire cost of his education including interest and sinking fund charges on capital raised for the school building. If he desires to continue attendance at High School after the completion of his sixteenth year, he should only be permitted to do so on paying fees sufficient to cover 100 percent of such entire cost. (Kidd, 1932, p. 34)

This recommendation was assailed on the grounds that it would cause serious repercussions in the labor force, lower economic and social efficiency, and create a caste society. Hugh Allan, president of the Oak Bay Conservative Association, informed Tolmie that the Report's proposal "would be unpopular" in the light of severe unemployment ("School Age," Note 41). The Trades and Labour Council warned the Premier that limiting free schooling would inevitably throw thousands of children on the overcrowded labor market where adults were already struggling for jobs (McDonald, Note 42). Professor Angus charged that the fee proposal was designed to sustain a reservoir of cheap unskilled labor that would continue into more prosperous times (Angus, 1932b, p. 48).

Denying education to the laboring classes, the teachers warned, would lower the efficiency of the work force. Consequently, workers' earning and purchasing power would be reduced and the domestic market weakened. Lowered efficiency would retard resource development and

place "difficulties in the way of competing effectively abroad." Additionally unemployment would be seriously aggravated since "the man who lacks efficiency is quickly squeezed out" of modern industry ("The Federation," 1932, p. 7). Curtailment of free education would force the youth into the ranks of the unskilled "drifters" and "floaters," claimed the *Victoria Colonist* ("Recommendations," Note 43). It would also "lower the standard of our citizenship," said the *BC Teacher*, "placing the majority of our people — since the majority would get little beyond the three R's — on a plane not very much above that of the Southern Crackers" ("The Federation," 1932, p. 7). "We would have . . . a riotous public," felt the *Victoria Times*, and "a lot of street gamins," said Vancouver School Trustees ("Government Reply," Note 44; "Kidd Report Alarms," Note 45). "Many of these future citizens," claimed UBC's Professor George Weir, "would . . . likely . . . find themselves in reformatories, detention homes or jails twenty years hence . . ." ("Weir Renews," Note 46).

Critics believed that school fees would restrict opportunity, lead to communism, and establish class barriers. People of average intelligence, who constituted the "real backbone of the democracy," stated Professor Weir, would have to pay fees or drop out of school. "According to the average distribution of wealth," he said, "the parents of half this middle 50 percent would be unable to pay. Hence a restrictive and selective principle based on wealth rather than character and ability would determine the privilege of attending high school" ("Dr. Weir," Note 47). Making higher education the preserve of the rich was soundly condemned by Henry Angus in the *Canadian Forum*: "The objective is to protect the lucrative monopoly of executive, professional, and scholastic careers which it is thought that the well-to-do ought to enjoy, provided that access to them is also afforded to 'pupils of exceptional ability and promise' by means of a system of scholarship" (Angus, 1932b, p. 47). While the poor man, thus, would be denied the opportunity of giving his own children a secondary education, "he would, as a taxpayer," said the *BC Teacher*, "be accorded the boon of paying something toward the education of the children of the well-to-do" ("The Federation," 1932, p. 7). Moreover, the BCTF charged that Kidd's scholarship program was an attempt to avoid arousing the active hostility of the poorer parents. The scholarships, the Federation said, injected "the ideals of competition and of honest effort duly rewarded," giving "a superficial air of merit to the proposals which, at bottom, have none" (p. 8). To deny educational facilities to British Columbians was to deprive the youth of their right to compete on equal terms and to make the province ripe for external exploitation (p. 7). In sum, if fees were imposed, "British Columbia would be abdicating her part in the building up of a Canadian democracy on a basis approaching equality of opportunity" (p. 8).

The implication that the fees could lead to communism was also a point of grave concern. Undoubtedly memories of the Russian revolution and the post-war social unrest in Western Canada were still fresh in many minds. "The youth of British Columbia," warned Weir, "must not at the caprice of certain capitalistic parvenus be condemned to a condition of comparative intellectual serfdom." Implementing the Report's recommendations, he said, "would not only embitter the youth as well as thoughtful citizens but would prove the most potent stimulus to the rapid spread of communism that could well be imagined" ("Newspaper," Note 48). The *Vernon News* agreed: "Where does the talk of red revolt come from, and there is such talk? It comes not from the fellow who has had the benefit of our educational facilities, but from starved intellect . . ." (Note 49).

Perhaps the greatest cause for alarm over charging fees was the belief that such a policy would produce a rigid caste society. "Charging fees," said Isabel Slater, secretary of the Provincial Parent Teachers' Federation, "would . . . mean that the opportunities for secondary education now enjoyed by the youth of the poorer families of the province would be greatly diminished while the opportunity for the youth of the wealthier families would not be seriously affected" (Note 50). "The Committee's ideas on education are the outgrowth of the Committee's idea of a proper social order, and this idea is not that of a democracy but of a feudal or caste system," proclaimed the BCTF ("1933 Convention," 1933, p. 9). The curtailment of educational opportunity, Kootenay teachers believed, would inevitably . . . produce a stratification of society resulting in the economic enslavement and social submergence of a large section of the Canadian people." "None of us want a class war," exclaimed Professor Angus. "While this Report is not a declaration of class war, it is a highly provocative act in inter-class diplomacy!" (Angus, 1932a, p. 23).

III

The Report assisted the destruction of Tolmie's government but did little to fashion the conservative revolution its authors sought. Viewing the document as criticism, implicit and explicit, the government printed a critique and refused to implement any of Kidd's major recommendations. The party split badly over the union government issue and was wiped out at the polls in 1933. As the manifesto of a would-be business oligarchy the Report failed because it was hastily considered by its authors, who seriously confused their interests with the province's and who critically overestimated their ability to dictate to the commoners. For the latter, the Report was seen as a fundamental challenge to a way of life. Nowhere were the precepts of that way more clearly delineated than in the realm of education. The Report failed, thus, primarily because it

threatened to extinguish the deeply ingrained popular belief that education was a right and that it opened the door to social and economic improvement. "All of us common people," said the *Vernon News*, "cherish the thought that our sons and daughters shall enjoy advantages denied to us. Any government that undertook to deny this natural hope and desire could not survive the first outburst of an enraged public opinion" (Note 51).

The Kidd Report acted as a vent through which issued a geyser of popular indignation, and of strongly held assumptions and expectations about schooling. This effervescence made possible a fairly detailed delineation of the amalgam of ideas and sentiments which constituted the common man's mentality regarding education. It was an amalgam fostered and reinforced by a broad cross-section of the citizenry — by professors, teachers, parents, newspaper editors, and socialists — making arguments which they believed, quite correctly, would appeal to the common people. While there was tension between how socialists saw the nature of society and how the majority farther right saw it, both sides underplayed their differences and magnified their common cause. It was remarkable how world political realities colored their thinking, how what came to be known as the human capital theory pervaded their thought, and how their sense of a Canadian way was to them both clear-cut and eminently desirable. They feared that Russian communism might result from shortened education or opposed big business dictation, which in its vilest forms they associated with German and Italian fascism; they assumed that the Canada of the future would be fundamentally a country of highly educated specialists and that education of the masses was directly proportional to individual wealth and national productivity; and they trusted that the national destiny was inextricably bound up with notions of democracy, self determination, and equal opportunity realized through the schools.

This last consideration was probably the most crucial. The sheer magnitude of the popular outrage to Kidd's educational recommendations suggests that the school functioned as an outlet for the insurrectionary impulses rife during the depression. Like religion, it offered salvation later, following dutiful apprenticeship. Important in confirming this viewpoint in the popular mind was the speed with which George Weir — co-author of the Putman-Weir *Survey of the Schools* (1925), key protagonist in the Kidd flare-up, and new Minister of Education — moved to attend to the critique of schooling which Kidd and company had presented. Since Weir and others had been saying much the same thing for years, it was a task he would relish. The concern for students' future career needs, the opposition to "formula, dogma and ritual" and to scholasticism, and the consideration of school finance, would all be dealt with. The promise of curricular and fiscal adjustment in the public interest and for a new world no doubt affirmed in the popular mind the

belief that schools were genuinely for all of us commoners. Without this belief, indeed without the schools (or perhaps with them as Kidd wanted them), the Great Depression may well have been more violent, more disruptive, and even more terrifying — especially for Kidd and his myopic cohorts.

NOTES

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- ¹ Several studies have touched on the Kidd Report. See, for example, Robin (1972, p. 239), Ormsby (1958, p. 448), Logan (1958, pp. 119-120), Angus (1932b, pp. 47-49), Parker (1970, p. 110), Gallagher (1969, p. 51), Skolrood (1967, pp. 179-180), Roald (1970, pp. 178-179), and Johnson (1964, pp. 194-195). These sources tend to stress the Report's reactionary functionlessness. The best detailed treatment is Groves (1976). In common with the above, however, this study deals little with education. For the latter note Mann in references.
- ² See Wilson (1977), Wilson and Jones (1976), and Jones (1978).

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- ² Tolmie, S. F. notes for meeting with Mr. Kidd, December 8, 1931, TP Box 7, 12.
- ³ Harvey, J. N. to Tolmie, March 23, 1932, TP Box 7, 12.
- ⁴ B.C. Fruit Growers' Association to Tolmie, March 24, 1932, TP Box 7, 12.
- ⁵ Sladen, J. E. to Tolmie, March 29, 1932, TP Box 7, 12.
- ⁶ Vancouver Board of Trade to Tolmie, April 15, 1932, TP Box 7, 12.
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- ⁸ Kidd replies to report critics. *Vancouver Sun*, October 11, 1932, TP Box 16.
- ⁹ Other people's views. *Victoria Times*, September 6, 1932, TP Box 16.
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- ¹¹ Kidd replies to report critics. *Vancouver Sun*, October 11, 1932, TP Box 16.
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- ¹⁵ Report challenge to public thought says R. W. Mayhew. *Victoria Colonist*, October 21, 1932, TP Box 16.
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- ¹⁷ Balanced budget necessary state business leaders. *Victoria Colonist*, October 7, 1932, TP Box 16.
- ¹⁸ Unanimity sought on Kidd recommendations. *Victoria Times*, October 3, 1932, TP Box 16.
- ¹⁹ Spurr, A. H. to Tolmie, September 23, 1932, TP Box 7, 11.
- ²⁰ Endorse report's economy demands. *Vancouver Province*, September 15, 1932, TP Box 16.

- ²¹ *British Columbia Clarion*, September 1932, p. 2.
- ²² Economist rakes Kidd Commission on its findings. *Victoria Colonist*, October 15, 1932, TP Box 16.
- ²³ B.C. tax problem. *Vancouver Sun*, November 10, 1932, TP Box 16.
- ²⁴ The committee's report. *Victoria Times*, August 30, 1932, TP Box 16.
- ²⁵ McDonald, Colin to Tolmie, September 9, 1932, TP Box 7, 11.
- ²⁶ Logie, Jack. The open road. *The Labour Stateman*, August 1932, p. 3.
- ²⁷ *The Labour Stateman*, editorial, August 1932, p. 3.
- ²⁸ *The Monetary Times*, September 2, 1932, pp. 7-8.
- ²⁹ Angus, H. F. *The Economics of the Kidd Report*, undated manuscript, TP Box 12.
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- ⁴⁵ Kidd Report alarm passes. *Victoria Times*, September 2, 1932, TP Box 16.
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