

Strange as it seems, no amount of learning can cure stupidity, and higher education positively fortifies it.

- Stephen Vizinczey, Hungarian-born Canadian writer (b. 1933)

One dictionary defines stupidity as "a poor ability to understand or to profit from experience."

Why would anyone with a higher education be stupid, possibly stupider than someone with less education?

Education--at least the education systems I am familiar with in many parts of the world--functions on a model that strongly promotes and supports conformity. Conformity, by definition, means following someone else's point of view of the world. Usually this takes the form of following the point of view of the power establishment, those who control power in a country, a state/province or a community.

Agree with the establishment and you "fit in." That means not only enjoying the benefits of agreeing with and supporting the ruling establishment and authority, but accepting its faults and warts without grumbling. And sometimes its illegal behaviour.

Poor people, for example, have trouble accepting the point of view of the establishment. Some slipped into poverty especially because they would not or could not conform to the belief system of the establishment. The establishment believes (sometimes even states publicly) that the poor are lazy, thus allowing themselves to be exempt from addressing the core of their problems.

People with severe health problems also have trouble supporting the establishment because they believe the people in power should do more to help them, especially to treat them according to the Golden Rule, the way the ruling people themselves would like to be treated in similar circumstances.

The people in power are never either poor or suffering from severe health problems. You never see someone with oxygen support or on a ventilator in a seat of a legislative assembly. These days you may see someone in a wheelchair, but those people, like the women who hold elected office, have fought their way through a morass and tangle of red tape to get there.

In some countries and elected legislative bodies, by law there must be a set minimum number or minimum percentage of seats for female representatives. I am not aware of any legislative body that has a minimum of requirement of representatives from among the poor or those with permanent health problems.

Ironically, social assistance for the poor--in whatever form that help may take--requires a huge portion of the budget for most governments. Health care, whether it comes from government coffers, as in Canada, or private health care or private health care companies with government assistance, demands a huge percentage of funds available for public use. In Canada, which has public health care, the budget for "free" health coverage requires over half the provincial budget totals.

Those who use the greatest portion of public funds have the least representation in legislative bodies. The people in power think this is a grand way of doing business. They, of course, are neither poor nor of ill health on a permanent basis. Consequently, the poor remain poor and those with permanent health problems seldom recover. That is, they remain permanently unhealthy even if good health care would cure their problems.

Does this mean that legislators suffer from "a poor ability to understand or to profit from experience?"

Anyone who hasn't been asleep for most of their life knows that corporations have great influence over governments. The bigger the corporations, the greater their contributions to political parties and elections and the greater their influence over decision making. So within government bureaucracies, conformity is not just the norm, it's the rule. Sometimes it's even the law.

Corporations themselves have bureaucracies run by a few people in power at the top. They like conformity because they have policies (both written and "informal") they want followed to the letter. In a sense, corporations are like the military, only without the uniforms (unless you call "suits" a uniform, which they may not be but they prove conformity), the foot stomping and the salutes.

The military, the ultimate in enforced conformity, requires underlings to obey even orders that don't make sense or that may contravene the laws of the land. That's enforced stupidity because those in lower ranks seldom get opportunities to think for themselves.

Religion enforces conformity, at least in the sense that what is said publicly must agree with the policies of those in higher authority. Those who don't want to conform either leave the faith, are banished or excommunicated. In a few cases, killed.

Most people who have passed through high school have learned that the wisest strategy for a paper or project is to give the teacher back what he or she wants. Be innovative, but only with certain parameters. In university and postgraduate school, the strictures tighten so that those who do not give the

professors what they want in the form they want it may not pass or may not receive sufficient marks to move on to a higher level.

I disagree with Vizinczey's statement to the extent that I maintain all organizations in societies create stupidity, not just fortify it. They make thinking for yourself an anti-social act.

It has been said that having everyone thinking for themselves would result in chaos, in anarchy. This is not true. Even anarchists think alike. As to human chaos, that is highly unlikely because our nature as social beings would forced us to consider all possibilities for policies and procedures before making decisions. Our social nature would compel us to choose leaders.

Chaos? No. It would shift the present power mongers from their perches and place those who have the ability to organize and lead without fear and intimidation into positions where they could act in the best interests of the public that elected them.

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Turning It Around: Causes and Cures for Today's Epidemic Social Problems, a guidebook for parents and teachers who want to grow children who can think for themselves without sinking into the abyss of banality, conformity and stupidity.

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