

dren, to whom she felt she had given everything she could, had dropped out of school, been in jail, and become involved with drugs. She lived in daily fear that her younger ones wouldn't survive at all. In 1987, as the shootings in the project increased, she started paying \$80 a month for burial insurance for her 10 and eight-year-old sons and her four-year-old triplets.

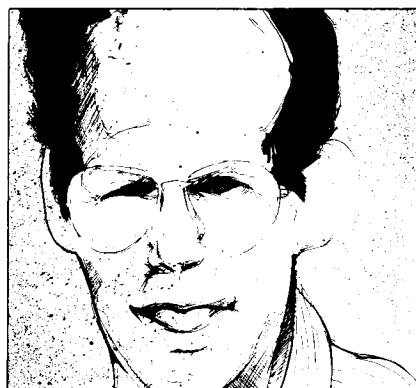
At the end of the book, Kotlowitz confesses to getting more involved with his subjects than journalists are supposed to. Having received a \$2,000 award for his *Journal* story about the Rivers family that was a forerunner to the book, he used the money to bail out one of the older children from jail. The earnings from the book are helping to send Pharoah and Lafayette to private school. We are left with a feeling of unbearable sadness that the public school, the institution Americans once looked to as providing the most promising route out of poverty, has now become one more force propelling inner city youngsters toward destruction.

Yet neither Kotlowitz nor his friends, Lafayette and Pharoah, have succumbed to despair. Pharoah works desperately to win the school spelling match despite his stutter (which gets worse every time he witnesses another act of violence). At his graduation from eighth grade, Lafayette "laughed and smiled and embraced his mother and friends with such warmth and spirit that everyone around him was filled with pride and hope for him." In describing the brothers' yearning for normalcy, their pleasure in shooting marbles and playing basketball amid the destruction around them, the author implies that those who worry about high risk children and dysfunctional parents could profit from thinking also about the devastation caused by high risk circumstances.

The disastrous effects of hostile environments on the development of youngsters and on the functioning of parents are at last beginning to attract the attention of scholars. Sociologist Frank Furstenberg, after studying the interconnections between disadvantaged neighborhoods and families in Philadelphia, concluded that "if we are committed to

strengthening the family, we must give more attention to rebuilding local institutions—schools, churches, neighborhood centers, and recreational services—that support families." The poignant testimony on this point in *There Are No Children Here* should impel not only academics, but policy makers and politicians as well to focus on the social forces that obstruct the passage out of poverty.

Kotlowitz believes that Americans will respond once they truly understand what life is like at the bottom, and the false economy of consigning the poor to conditions that make it almost impossible for children to grow up whole. We have the ability to assure that the children who require help will receive it from the most competent professionals and



ALEX KOTLOWITZ

the most comprehensive services. These children should no longer be dependent on schools, clinics, social agencies, and housing that are understaffed and overwhelmed, offering the worst and the least.

Influential organizations throughout the nation, including major foundations and business groups, are venturing into bold new efforts to strengthen human service institutions in reaction to the growing public alarm about the Other America. Unless government at all levels becomes engaged in these efforts with more than rhetoric, however, it is hard to imagine that life will change much for families such as the Riverses. Alex Kotlowitz' book should raise the chances of massive social action—on a scale that will match the enormity of the need he so eloquently describes.

Roots of Neglect

The Child and the State in India

By Myron Weiner

Princeton.

213 pp. \$45.00.

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AMERICAN INTEREST in India, both intellectual and public, has diminished in proportion to the prominence that Indian immigrants (now numbering nearly a million) have achieved in our universities, research laboratories, professions, and indeed all walks of life. One might be tempted, therefore, to dismiss this book by arguably the most perceptive scholar of that nation's politics today as being of concern only to "Indiawallahs." But that would be a mistake. Myron Weiner's original and disturbing analysis of primary education in India offers lessons that illuminate much else on the current policy landscape.

The situation he uncovers is startling. Despite the widespread impression to the contrary, India does not have legislation mandating the education of children. Instead, following Britain, it has "enabling" state-level laws that empower local bodies to make schooling obligatory should they choose to do so. For the most part, they have not.

The resulting gap between the lofty aspirations of the leadership and the realities on the ground is dramatic. The Indian Constitution declared in 1950 that within a decade the government should provide "free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years." In 1981, however, 82.2 million of the 158.8 million children ages six to 14 still were not in school, and only 41.4 per cent of the population above age five could read.

Relative to China, Taiwan, South Korea, and Sri Lanka—all well-known success stories in the drive for literacy—India’s record looks especially appalling. But it hardly fares better when compared with most Third World nations. For example, taking the percentage of literates over age 15, Weiner shows that at 40.8 per cent India recently stood far below several Asian, African and Latin American countries, among them Indonesia (74.1 per cent), the Philippines (88.7 per cent), Zaire (61.2 per cent), Kenya (59.2 per cent), Colombia (69.1 per cent), and Peru (87 per cent).

One can only guess at the effects of India’s neglect. Yet the spread of literacy is widely believed to have been a critical factor in the success of the Far Eastern economies. So it would appear that the failure to spur social and economic mobility through education is a major reason for the disappointing performance of India’s economy. But Weiner concentrates, rather, on the causes of the negligence.

The nonempiricism that plagues India, where resolutions and legislation are routinely mistaken for action and implementation, is one obvious candidate. Recall V.S. Naipaul’s description, in *An Area of Darkness*, of the New Delhi hotel worker who sweeps the floor and leaves it dirtier than when he started. Perhaps this follows from the fact that popular Hinduism downgrades consequential ethics. As Krishna says in the *Bhagavadgita* to the vacillating warrior Arjuna—just before the great war depicted in the *Mahabharata*—action (required by dharma or, loosely, duty) is important, not results.

But there is a more universal factor involved here as well. Through an examination of the historical experiences of Germany, Austria, England, the United States, and Japan, Weiner brilliantly demonstrates that the spread of compulsory primary education has been closely related to the adoption and enforcement of child labor laws. The willingness of governments to intervene has depended on a varying mix of ideology and interests countervailing the arguments that “poor parents need children at work” and that “poor countries can-

not afford to keep children out of work.”

Weiner’s account of the role of ideology in the policies of the different nations is truly splendid. He points out that literacy had long been encouraged in such places as Germany, Scotland and colonial Massachusetts, where the Protestant Reformation taught that everyone should be able to read the Bible. By the 18th century, the way children were viewed had changed: They were now seen as “priceless,” transformed from economically valuable wage earners to emotionally invaluable objects.

Of particular interest is Weiner’s recounting of the strong stand that Adam Smith (and other Scottish economists, philosophers and intellectuals) took in favor of mandatory education and child labor regulations. Our many laissez faire theorists, who often confuse Smith with the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin, would do well to ponder the eloquent argument for intervention that Weiner quotes at length from *The Wealth of Nations*:

“In the progress of the division of labor, the ... man whose whole life is spent performing a few simple operations ... has no occasion to exert his understanding, or to exercise his invention in finding out expedients for removing difficulties which never occur. He naturally loses, therefore, the habit of such exertion, and generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become.... In every improved and civilized society this is the state into which the laboring poor, that is, the great body of the people, must necessarily fall, unless government takes some pains to prevent it.... The most essential parts of education, however, to read, to write, and account, can be acquired at [an] early period of life....

“For a very small expense the public can facilitate, can encourage, and can even *impose* [emphasis added] upon almost the whole body of the people, the necessity of acquiring those most essential parts of education.”

Indians have failed to profit from religious and secular advances elsewhere because their cultural and intellectual traditions have pulled the opposite way. Weiner asserts that the explanation for the lack of support for education and

child labor laws is to be found less in “India’s low per capita income and economic situation” than in “a set of beliefs that are widely shared by educators, social activists, trade unionists, academic researchers, and more broadly, by members of the Indian middle class. These beliefs are held by those outside as well as those within the government, by observant Hindus and by those who regard themselves as secular, and by leftists as well as centrists and rightists.

“At the core of these beliefs are the Indian view of the social order, notions concerning the respective roles of upper and lower social strata, the role of education as maintaining differentiations among social classes, and concerns that ‘excessive’ and ‘inappropriate’ education for the poor would disrupt existing social arrangements.”

This startling thesis, backed by intensive field research that took Weiner across numerous Indian states and included interviews with bureaucrats, politicians, social workers, teachers, intellectuals, and children, is totally plausible. Moreover, by exposing the underpinnings of India’s policy and pointing to the successful implementation of compulsory education in countries of various levels of economic development, Weiner encourages us to discard the preconceptions and spurious arguments surrounding a range of issues.

Democracy, human rights, environmental standards, and even workplace safety are clearly more than the luxuries of affluent nations. In fact, like primary schooling, these are values in themselves, and there is good reason to believe that in the long run they could be of economic benefit. If, for instance, the air fills up with smog and the rivers are saturated with industrial waste, there will be few healthy people left in the end to work the plants that stunted by polluting. And the inevitable clean-up is likely to be much more expensive than the prevention.

Prudence alone, if not social conscience and empathy, requires that poor countries attend expeditiously to the issues Weiner raises. *The Child and the State in India* persuaded me of the possibilities. I hope it will also persuade the policy makers in those nations.