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Books versus 'The Book': The 1974 Kanawha County Textbook Controversy

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Abstract

In 1974 Kanawha County, West Virginia witnessed one of the most violent textbook wars the USA has seen. The paper chronicles the direction of the dispute identifying key issues, protagonists and ideological positions; this is followed by an analysis of core protester motivation and intention focusing around the embryonic emergence of Christian fundamentalism and the politics of Conservatism. This is placed within the context of Gramscian notions of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic struggle (Gramsci 1971), the construction of moral panic (Cohen 1972) and authoritarian populism (Hall 1988) as organising ideas. Finally, the paper reflects upon how the Kanawha incident offered a template for the subsequent development of an articulated Christian fundamentalist and political right-wing counter-hegemonic movement aimed at dominating educational policy agendas in the USA.

Keywords: School textbooks; Identity; Religious fundamentalism; Moral panic; Authoritarian populism; Othering.

Introduction

In 1974 the population of Kanawha County, West Virginia, an area of approximately 900 square miles, was overwhelming white and Protestant. Outside the principle town of Charleston the majority of residents lived in small and closely-knit communities stretching along the ridges and valleys of the densely forested Appalachian Mountains that for generations had fashioned a perception of remoteness and a fiercely protected independence. These mono-cultural and strongly unified communities were sustained and nourished by a cultural and moral code emphasising a profound dependence upon family and God. For many Kanawha residents religion powerfully shaped their identity and lifestyles, provided intimate alliances within community-based kinships and forged a resilient and personal connection between culture and religious belief.

Against a background of cultural and political challenges that during the 1960s and 1970s questioned what it meant to be American, this way of life with its habitual and time-honoured beliefs, assurances and certainties was vigorously confronted. The 1970s was a decade during which the civil rights movement became a powerful and inexorable force for change; when opposition to the Vietnam War gathered overwhelming momentum; when youth counter-culture, environmentalism and feminism became iconoclastic social movements leading to a plurality of moral codes and lifestyles and it was a decade that saw the impeachment of a president. While the Appalachians remained a physical barrier they could not isolate Kanawha from exposure to an array of alternative values, moral standpoints and ideas that represented significant counterpoints to those of many living within the County.

In 1974 an America in transition set foot in Kanawha's schools in the form of Federal and State laws that the diverse and complex fusion of ethnic and cultural identities and attitudes that was re-making America required that the school curriculum and curriculum materials explicitly represent the new America. (Nash et al. 1997). In response, in March 1974 the Kanawha County Textbook Selection Committee recommended the adoption of 325 Language Arts textbooks and supplementary materials some of which included material by, and about, African-Americans and alternative traditions, cultures and lifestyles. As required by law, the Kanawha School Board displayed the books in Charleston Public Library and invited community opinion and, as with previous adoption processes, few were received (Burger 1978).

Figure 1: *Alice Moore at a public textbook adoption meeting, 27 June 1974. The meeting room was full and members of the public had to listen to the discussion through open windows.*

On 11th April after the School Board voted unanimously to adopt the textbooks Alice Moore, a 29-year-old mother of four and member of the School Board, decided to take a closer look. Moore's analysis of the books produced a lengthy and eclectic list of withering criticism aimed at, among others, the work of Alan Ginsberg, Malcolm X, Gwendolyn Brooks, Dick Gregory, Eldridge Cleaver, George Orwell, Arthur Miller and Lawrence Ferlinghetti's poem *Christ Climbed Down* accused of being anti-Christian Moore judged many of the books to be sexually explicit, anti-American and pro-Communist that through the study of dialectology contained inappropriate English usage and racist anti-white stories (Foerstel 2002). Claims were made that some children's stories had been reinterpreted to present readers with moral and ethical dilemmas concerning right and wrong that undermined the values of Kanawha parents; including suggesting that the Bible could be interpreted as a set of mythical stories rather than, as was claimed, the literal word of God (Lewis & Hennan 1991). Moore spoke to increasingly large audiences, giving media interviews and manufacturing a climate of populist resistance and hostility.

Figure 2: *Textbook Protesters echoing a central theme of the conflict.*

On 27th June the School Board voted to adopt the books but in the face of growing opposition agreed to drop eight objected to by critics (Hillocks 1978). The meeting unanimously agreed that an advisory committee be formed (75% parents, 25% teachers) to advise a further committee (75% teachers, 25% parents) who would make final recommendations to the Board for textbook adoption (Board of Education 27th June, 1974). In a further response to criticism the Board proposed that

> ... no student be required to use a book that is objectionable to that student's parents on either moral or religious grounds. The parents of each student shall have the opportunity to present a written signed statement to the principal of the school, listing the books that are objectionable for that parent's child. That no teacher is authorized to indoctrinate a student to follow either moral values, or religious beliefs which are objectionable to either the student or the student's parents (quoted in Lewis & Hennen 1991, 343).

These compromises failed to placate Moore and her allies and throughout July and August thousands of flyers quoting passages considered offensive and listing 'dirty words' were distributed across Kanawha.

Moore was joined at the centre of opposition by a collection of self-ordained preachers, Marvin Horan, a truck driver during the week; Avis Hill, a plumber by trade; Ezra Graley, who ran a roofing company; Henry Thaxton, an accountant and Charles Quigley, a full time minister. Jointly they formed The Concerned Citizens of Kanawha County a loose association of churches with an organisational base rooted within their fundamentalist congregations (Page &Clelland 1978). Throughout the dispute this group preached a doctrinaire, fundamentalist form of Christianity rooted

in Biblical literalism linked to an unequivocal and explicit opposition to the textbooks (Provenzo 1990).

The outcome of their campaign was the manufacture of a potent moral panic an authoritative form of ideological consciousness raising through which the 'silent majority' is encouraged to support increasingly coercive and conservative measures of cultural, moral and political control. In a seminal work, Cohen describes how a moral panic focuses upon a specific event that triggers an emotive public response which is then presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnosis and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to (Cohen 1972, 9).

Figure 3: *Anti-book protesters demonstrating in the streets of Charleston*

Moral panic, what McRobbie calls a "… something must be done about it attitude" (McRobbie 1994, 199) became a prominent feature of the dispute and a central ingredient of the increasingly vociferous rhetorical discourses and devices used by textbook opponents at rallies and demonstrations.

At the opening of the school year in September 1974, 20% of the County's 45,000 pupils, mainly in the eastern rural areas of the County and in the East Bank and Du Pont areas of Charleston, failed to attend kept away by parents who either objected to the books or feared for the safety of their children. Rosemary Basham, a Kanawha primary school teacher recalled that

> On the first day of school, all the staff waited in the front hallway to meet the buses and greet the students. The first bus pulled up – and only one student got off. And so it went. By the time all the buses had come and gone we had only a handful of students for grades kindergarten through sixth, which at that time filled 13 classrooms (*Charleston Gazette*, 22nd August 2009).

During September and October 1974 the dispute spiralled into violent confrontation. On 3rd September 3,500 coal miners, already in dispute with their employers, went on strike in sympathy with the protesters leading to factories and shops closing and to a public transport strike. Protesters blockaded school gates and some teachers and children needed a police escort to make their way past angry crowds; teachers received death threats and some schools found themselves under police protection. The cars of pro and anti-book supporters were blown up, a police car escorting a school bus was hit by gunfire (*Charleston Gazette* 13th September, 1974) and trees were cut down to block roads along which school buses travelled (Charleston Gazette 13th September, 1974). On 11th September the School Board agreed to remove the books from classrooms, subject them to review by a 'citizen's committee' (*Pittsburgh Post Gazette* 14th November 1974, 7) and to close schools for four days because, according to Schools Superintendant Kenneth Underwood, "…. There's apparently no way that we can have law and order. Mobs are ruling and we're extremely afraid somebody will be hurt"(*Time* 30th September, 1974).

Figure 4: *Protestors demonstrating at a school entrance*

People got shot; getting off a bus at a transfer terminal Everett Mitchell produced a gun and fired several times in the direction of a strike blockade causing minor injury to one man. Mitchell was badly beaten and taken to hospital for surgery *(Charleston Gazette*, September 13th, 1974). The next day at the United Parcel Service (UPS) centre Bill Noel (said to have been a pro-book advocate) claimed to have panicked when blockade protesters approached him. He fired a shot hitting Philip Cochran in the chest. Cochran was not a protester but a driver for UPS turned away from the site by protesters *(Charleston Daily Mail* 13th September, 1974). Alice Moore was provided with police protection and forced to leave Kanawha for a short while to ensure her safety (Foerstel 2002). The tension and depth of feeling was disturbing, Rosemary Basham remembers

> If there was any doubt as to the extent of our community's disdain, it was made clear one morning when two of our teachers were met on the front steps

> of the school by a parent carrying a shotgun. “Are you going in there to teach them dirty books?” “Sir,” the teacher tried to explain, “the books aren't even in our schools.” He followed them in and confronted the principal. I will never forget that image, 35 years ago, of seeing my principal, calmly sitting at a table, trying to reason with a man standing beside her with a shotgun. He left, unconvinced (*Charleston Gazette* 22nd August 2009).

Figure 5: *Elementary school pupils passing through a school gate blockade.*

On 9th October West Branch Elementary School in Cabin Creek was dynamited and Midway Elementary School in Campbell’s Creek firebombed. On 11th October Molotov cocktails were thrown at Chandler Elementary School in Charleston and on 14th October Loudendale Elementary School was firebombed (Page & Clelland 1978). Superintendant Underwood announced he would resign his position at the end of his contract because

> ... our children have learned more about un-American and un-Christian behaviour in the past few weeks from some of the adult population than the schools could teach in 12 years” **(**Board of Education, Kanawha County 27th June, 1974).

Figure 6: *Classroom damage from dynamite attack at Midway Elementary School*

On 8th November the School Board voted 4-l (Moore voted against) to return the books to schools with the exception of 36 of the most controversial titles. In a further concession the Board proposed a new set of rigorous and uncompromising guidelines for textbook adoption requiring that

> 1. Textbooks for use in the classrooms of Kanawha County shall recognize the sanctity of the home and emphasize its importance as the basic unit of American society.
> 2. Textbooks must not intrude into the privacy of students' homes by asking personal questions about the inner feelings or behaviour of themselves or their parents by, direct question, statement or inference.
> 3. Textbooks must not contain profanity.
> 4. Textbooks must not encourage or promote racial hatred.
> 5.Textbooks must encourage loyalty to the United States and emphasize the responsibilities of citizenship and the obligation to redress grievances through legal processes. Textbooks must not encourage sedition or revolution against our government or teach or imply that an alien form of government is superior.
> 6. Textbooks shall teach the true history and heritage of the United States and of any other countries studied in the curriculum. Textbooks must not defame our nation's founders or misrepresent the ideals and causes for which they struggled and sacrificed" (quoted in Lewis & Hennen 1991, 346).

Apart from a violent and acrimonious School Board meeting on 12th December (*Charleston Daily Mail* 13th September, 1974) this concession, unsurprisingly,

appeased many protesters and with the miners reaching agreement with their employers and winter arriving protests subsided. By January 1975 the police had gathered evidence of criminal behaviour by core protesters and on 17th January Marvin Horan was indicted with three others accused of conspiring to blow up two elementary schools; Horan was found guilty on one charge and sentenced to three years in prison.

The Kanawha controversy was for one commentator "…the most prolonged, intense and violent textbook protest this country has ever witnessed" (Hillock, quoted in Foerstel 2002, 6). The dispute is said to have created "… an atmosphere of terrorism"(National Education Association(NEA) 1975, 27) while Apple interpreted it as "… one of the most explosive controversies over what schools should teach, who should decide, and what beliefs should guide our educational programs " (Apple 2000,181). Yet previous textbook adoption processes in Kanawha had been routine and lacklustre events free from any organised opposition and the politics of polarization and violence - what caused such mayhem this time?

'Othering' in the defence of identity and community

Communities are usually conceived of when we engage in the process of imagining outsiders positioned in direction opposition to 'our' values, beliefs and codes of behaviour – there can be no 'us' without 'them' (Anderson 1983). It is definitions of the 'other' that are a critical feature of how communities define themselves by excluding those whose values are considered different, perhaps alien and deviant. The Kanawha dispute illustrated that when cultural, religious and social identity is seemingly threatened by those considered outsiders one reaction is to retreat into potent forms of aggressive cultural conservatism and vigorous forms of othering. Appalachian writer Denise Giardina, who grew up in a West Virginia coal camp and worked as a substitute teacher in Kanawha during the dispute writes

> I shared the anger of a powerless people at the erosion of traditional mountain values, yet I could not join in the protest against multicultural school textbooks. I still lived up a holler, but I fled each Sunday to a local Episcopal church to worship with people who disdained the ways of 'crickers'. The innocence I had lost when I obtained my education was irretrievable … On the other hand, I felt equally estranged from mainstream America. Who the hell was I? (Giardina 1998, 130).

It is commonplace to argue that "For better or worse, today's texts reflect society's interests, beliefs and values" (Chambliss & Calfee 1998, 6) or at least those of dominant and hegemonically powerful groups. For the Kanawha protesters the books did the opposite by threatening to symbolically and culturally deconstruct their imagined community replacing it with one they would not recognize. The new books, their authors and sponsors represented an ideological, political and moral coalition of interests that was foreign and which undermined the inherited collective knowledge upon which the culture of protester communities rested (Hollinswood 1998, 52). Underpinning this struggle was what Apple has called a 'clear sense of loss', loss of control, security, knowledge and values where "The binary opposition of 'we' and 'they' become important here. 'We' are law abiding, hard working, decent, virtuous

> and homogeneous'. The 'theys' are very different. They are lazy, permissive, heterogeneous ..." (Apple 1993, 7-8).

Protester fears coalesced around the deep anxiety that the traditional culture of home and hearth would be replaced by voices representing alien milieus, creeds and principles. In many protester communities what you knew is what you collectively inherited and no more; knowledge was not socially constructed or mediated, it was declarative and passed down from generation to generation as unquestioned truths. Moffett illustrates this point in claiming that protesters were resistant to their children learning about alternatives ideas and values

> The rich range of ideas and viewpoints, the multicultural smorgasbord, of the books adopted in Kanawha County were exactly what fundamentalists don't want. They believe that most of the topics English teachers think make good discussion are about matters they consider already settled. The invitation to reopen them through pluralistic readings, role-playing, values clarification, personal writing, and open-ended discussion can only be taken as an effort to indoctrinate their children in the atheistic free-thinking of the Eastern seaboard liberal establishment that scoffs at them and runs the country according to a religion of Secular Humanism" (Moffett 1989, 75-76).

Figure 7: *The Reverend Avis Hill speaking at a protest rally outside the Kanawha School Board of Education office.*

Racial forms of othering appeared throughout the dispute. Not all protesters were motivated by racism and some Christian conservative members of the black community in Charleston were opposed to the books. Nevertheless, racist abuse was hurled at meetings, racist signs erected, school buildings vandalized with Klu Klux Klan and Nazi symbols, burning crosses appeared at several places in and around Charleston and white supremacists attended protest rallies (*Charleston Gazette* 19th October, 1974; NEA 1975; Mason 2009). In a 2009 radio interview Steven Horan, the nephew of Marvin Horan, claimed that in 1974 Campbell's Creek was "… a racist

community, there's no doubt about it ... If you'd been a strange black person that got lost up Campbell's Creek you'd have been dead that night, that's 35 years ago" (West Virginia Public Broadcasting 23rd March 2010). In the same programme Mildred Holt, an English teacher in Kanawha, agreed, "I think it was about race not about culture … Then when I saw signs saying get the nigger books out and when I looked out of my office window and saw the Klu Klux Klan I knew then that is was purely racial" (West Virginia Public Broadcasting, 23rd March 2010).

Figure 8: *Senior Klu Klux Klan member Dale Reusch attends an anti-textbook rally in January 1975; the Reverend Marvin Horan is holding the umbrella.*

Alice Moore, Horan, Graley and Hill vigorously denied all claims of racism arguing that opposition had nothing to do with race but with attacks the books were said to make upon Appalachian culture, values and beliefs. What core protesters managed to do was to successfully manufacture a narrative of victimhood where they could identify themselves as victims of liberal ideology promoting left-wing, anti-American and anti-Christian hegemonic plots. The significance of victimhood as a cultural and ideological stance is that it is a fundamental keystone in the protection of an imagined community and essential for the foundation of a unified sense of identity. This victimhood consciousness was given symbolic potency through a new racism based not upon ideas of innate biological superiority and exclusivity but upon a supposed incompatibility of cultural traditions (Matthews, 1974, 24). Mason has no doubts that the position of some protesters was a racially-based form of othering designed to maintain "… Appalachian 'heritage' as a white, Christian culture in an increasingly multicultural world" (Mason 2009, 16-17).

Developing a counter-culture: 'Othering' in defence of nation

Hall has argued that "It is always the case that the Right is what it is partly because of what the Left is …" (Hall 1979, 20) and while we need to be wary of deterministic distinctions between the political left and right that emerged within the dispute we can see this process at work within protester responses. Layered upon the protection of the imagined community of local Appalachia was a varied set of concerns embodied in the representational discourse of the textbooks. For many protesters the books were evocative of a liberalized, bankrupt and permissive America that had become increasingly infected with a cultural, moral and political pollution generating anarchy and chaos.

Figure 9: *Media cartoons often presented book protesters as ignorant, rural 'hillbillies'. This cartoon was published in the Charleston Gazette on 14th September 1974.*

We see in the attitudes of Kanawha protesters a perception that, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, gathered significant support in America and continues to appear in the grassroots politics of the libertarian and conservative Tea Party movement, that of local, state and national bureaucracies that are said to treat ordinary people with disrespect by "... talking down to the labouring class of people" (Apple 2003, 26). Indeed 36 years later some protesters argue that it was Alice Moore who provided the political template for politicians such as Sarah Palin.

Despite the fact that opposition to the books cut across traditional socio-economic and class-based distinctions, there existed a genuine and pervasive impression among protesters that their apprehensions were considered unreasonable, nonsensical and originated from a collective of obdurate, ignorant, poorly educated, rural racists and religious fanatics. A perceived disregard of parental concerns was an early cause of the dispute within a context where "… for a number of years, the school system had failed to communicate effectively with its rural communities and to involve them sufficiently in the development of educational objectives and programs" (Seltzer 1974, 432). Apple's suggestion that people often 'become right' due to their

interactions with unresponsive institution (Apple 2003) illustrates a key point of an emerging discourse within protest groups.

One protesting coalminer put this concisely in claiming that "We built these schools with our sweat and taxes and, son, no bureaucrat is going to tell me that my kid has to learn garbage"(Quoted in Seltzer, 1974,432). An Evangelical youth pastor claimed that “Most of the trouble would never have happened if the superintendent would have climbed out of that ivory tower and said, “I’m here to listen to you, not as your superior, but as an equal, as a fellow citizen. Express your concerns. How can we address it?” (Edds quoted in Martin 1997, 132). These charges accuse Kanawha’s educational bureaucrats of failing to manufacture an educational hegemony around the textbook adoption process, an “... ideological umbrella under which different groups who usually might not totally agree with each other can stand” (Gramsci 1971, 23).

But, because the construction and exercise of hegemonic power is reliant upon the willingness of those who are its objects to respond in a manner favoured by dominant groups it becomes improbable when subordinate groups feel ignored, rejected or coerced. While crises in hegemony occur when dominate elites fail to provide environments within which consensus can be found they also occur when those who feel alienated pass from a state of political and ideological inactivity and indifference to one where they organise and articulate demands that produce a counter-hegemonic response.

As the dispute gathered momentum it quickly became clear that core protest leaders had no intention of reaching a compromise agreement with Kanawha’s educational bureaucracy who by November 1974 had answered many of their concerns. Designed to end the dispute, dissipate the moral panic and populist alienation, the decisions to involve parents and community representatives in the selection of textbooks and to adopt new guidelines for adoption were significant compromises on the part of the School Board designed to create a Gramscian compromise equilibrium and spontaneous consent. They were compromises rejected by the public school teacher's labour union, the National Education Association (NEA), who claimed they would “... make the selection and adoption of instructional procedures a nearly impossible task – and a nightmare ... Under the new system, the influence of lay citizens is not only present, it literately permeates every area of curriculum planning and textbook evaluation” (NEA 1975 35-36).

These concessions failed to end the dispute because from its early days its focus changed from being a local disagreement about school textbooks to become a counter-hegemonic struggle for the American psyche, a crusade in pursuit of a quite specific view of an America established upon Christian and patriotic foundations that rejected all forms of secular humanism and relativism – the dispute metamorphosed into a “… holy war between people who depend on books and people who depend upon the Book” (Cowan 1974,19). The claimed truth of the Christian Bible was presented as an axiom rather than a product of logic and reason. Pastor Lewis Harrah, a prominent protester, illustrated the impossibility of compromise

> The standards and articles of faith of our church rest completely in our belief that the Bible is the absolute, infallible Word of God. We do not intend to compromise

> our beliefs ... this is not a situation where opposing views can be reconciled … There is a line drawn and the people stand either to the right or to the left of it … (quoted in Lewis & Hennen 337).

Martin places the dispute within a context of fundamental biblical absolutism where

> In their view, schoolbooks – like the Bible –mshould have one meaning and one only, and it should be obvious to all. Cultivating a taste and talent for multiple interpretations can only increase the likelihood of thought and behaviour that call into question the settled and dependable nature of one's community and religion (Martin 1997, 23).

There was no disagreement among textbook supporters, or within the School Board, that parents had the right to prevent their children using books they considered inappropriate; there was, however, unreserved criticism for protesters who did not want any Kanawha children to access the books. Superintendant Underwood argued that "While parents have the right to request that their children be exempted from any assignment or books which would be counter to their moral convictions, it is equally true that they may not extend this right to the point of censoring books for the whole community, not if we respect individual freedom" (quoted in Young 1974, 265).

How did core textbook protesters create such a successful counter-hegemonic movement? First, the leading members of the coalition proved themselves to be an astute and strategically innovative group; in attacking the perceived liberal hegemony manifest in the books they constructed a new alliance linking the absolutist convictions of Christian fundamentalism with commonsense populism and conservative political ideology. This required crossing into ideological spaces not previously occupied to colonize and transform the landscape of education and school bureaucracy to create a new discourse of truth. The construction of this discourse saw Kanawha protestors lay claim to traditional core values and beliefs imbedded within American culture such as democracy, justice, freedom and rights and re-make them in opposition to the America said to be symbolised in the textbooks and in support of cultural, social and political community they endorsed.

At the centre of the socially constructed conservative agenda in Kanawha was a compelling discourse of authoritarian populism. Used by Stuart Hall to describe the emergence of new-right conservative politics in 1970s Britain, authoritarian populism involves the political transformation of public understanding of cultural, social and political crises affecting the State. Pragmatic and opportunistic, authoritarian populism's success is not based upon a ".... capacity to dupe unsuspecting folk but in the way it addresses real problems, real and lived experiences, real contradictions - and yet is able to represent them within a logic of discourse which pulls them systematically into line with policies and class strategies of the right" (Hall 1988, 56). Through the construction of moral panics and 'mechanisms of fear' (Poulantzas 1973, 203) authoritarian populism took the cultural, social, political and educational themes coalescing around the dispute and configurated them around solutions aligned with the politics and policies of the right. In its appeal to intuitive notions of anti-State and anti-intellectual commonsense authoritarian populism found a ready home in the nascent views of the Kanawha protesters, it was able to do so because it relies upon the belief that political good sense does not rest with the theoretical

posturing of experts but within the accumulated experience, knowledge and commonsense of the community.

Basing a discourse of derision upon authoritarian populism leading conservatives from emerging national pressure groups became closely involved in the dispute at an early stage (NEA 1975). Viewing the dispute as an opportunity to create a powerful grassroots ideological and political force, conservative groups committed time, expertise and money to manufacture a counter-hegemonic framework and a commonsense intellectual credibility to what was for many a diffuse set of emotions and perceptions (Bishop & Cushing 2008). The success of the Conservative movement throughout the 1980s and 1990s that spawned, among others, Jerry Falwell, Rush Limbaugh, the Heritage Foundation, Ronald Reagan, George W. Bush and Karl Rove was not foisted upon the American nation through a right-wing conspiracy but emerged from the fears, ambitions and politics that were a consequence of incidents such as the Kanawha dispute. Writing in 1980, Park suggested that "The issues surfacing on today's New and Evangelical Right can be examined in the literature of such groups as Educational Research Analysts, the Heritage Foundation, and the John Birch Society, all of which exploited the Kanawha textbook controversy" (Park 1980, 609).

In April and May 1974 Alice Moore sent some of the books to the conservative textbook analysts Mel and Norma Gabler, founders of Educational Research Analysts. In the midst of the dispute Norma Gabler claimed that

> Textbooks today major in the defects and faults of our government …in our free enterprise system, and in our society. Too often they decline, or refuse to point out, the successes and achievements of our system [they have] made our youth think the American system has failed. It must be replaced. And we parents wonder why some young people are dedicated to the destruction of our American way of life. Each generation has the responsibility to pass their heritage to the succeeding generation … Today's youth have received a distorted version of our heritage … We, the parents, should demand that a true and unbiased picture of the American system be presented to our young people ... If not, we will soon see a real revolution and the death of a great nation (quoted in *The Gladewater Mirror,* 28th July, 1974).

In early October the Gablers spent several days in Kanawha addressing a number of meetings (Hefley 1976). With the Gablers' help core protesters were able to produce hundreds of detailed, point by point, line by line objections to the texts in a style that became emblematic of the way the Gablers were to analyse school textbooks for the next thirty years.

Opposition seamlessly mirrored the Gablers' Christian fundamentalist claims that 'bad' textbooks were responsible for an eclectic list of problems including declining academic standards, rebellion against parental authority, sexual permissiveness, drug and alcohol addiction, pornography, child abuse, unwanted pregnancy, communism, Satanism and the decline of American hegemony. A powerful sense of the conservative and fundamentalist nature of protestor concern emerged from the text of a petition demanding textbooks be banned which did not acknowledge

> The family unit emerges from the marriage of man and woman;
> Belief in a Supernatural Being, or a power beyond ourselves, or a power beyond our comprehension;
> The political system set forth in the Constitution of the United States of America. The economic system commonly referred to as free enterprise where the exchange of goods and services is governed by the forces of supply and demand rather than a central governmental authority;
> Respect for the laws of the Nation, the State, and its subdivisions and for the judicial system which administers those laws;
> The history and heritage of this nation as the record of one of the noblest civilizations that has existed;
> Respect for the property of others;
> Advocate, suggest, or imply that traditional rules governing the grammar and vocabulary of the English language are not a proper and worthwhile subject for academic pursuit and do not, in fact, constitute the means by which well-educated people communicate most effectively" (quoted in NEA 1975, 39).

Many protester claims relied upon the language of rhetoric and polemic rather than evidence and reason. The arch-conservative John Birch Society contributed to the dispute by distributing literature suggesting that "… it is no accident that Communists and others long associated with this conspiracy are among the staunchest advocates of the growing ménage of schools courses on sex" (quoted in *The Gladewater Mirror*, 28th July, 1974). A November 1974 John Birch pamphlet praised the Kanawha protesters for their patriotism and religious conviction claiming that parents were incensed by textbooks that included a "... liberal sprinkling of obscenities; atrocious language passed off as non-standard' grammar; numerous subversive and Communist authors; inflammatory racial tracts; openly radical polemics; promotion of narcotic drugs; and, even detailed and explicit glamorization of prostitution" (Hoar 1974,1).

The Heritage Foundation, now an influential lobby group and in 1975 establishing itself as a conservative think-tank, supported and helped organise opposition. The Foundation's lawyer James McKenna met with Marvin Horan and acted as legal counsel. Foundation worker Connie Marshner, now a well-established Conservative commentator, organised a conference on parental rights and provided media training for key protesters (Mason 2007). Marshner later recognised the dispute for what it quickly became; in a 2009 radio interview she claimed "… you could say that the Kanawha County issue really helped set the stage for the emergence of the Christian right" (West Virginia Public Broadcasting 2010).

Conclusion

The Kanawha dispute represents one of the earliest forays of the politicized Christian and fundamentalist right into educational politics and there is no doubting its success. Locally, opposition succeeded in

- Having banned Language Arts textbooks that protesters considered were at odds with their values, social and religious principles;
- Manufacturing the establishment of a powerful voice for parental and community representatives designed to ensure that no textbook would

appear in a Kanawha school if parents considered that its content compromised or questioned parental and religious authority or presented views critical of the American nation and its cultural traditions;
- Proving that a powerfully organised and strategically astute protest movement could force a Schools Superintendent to resign;
- Creating a climate of fear and resentment among some members of the Kanawha teaching profession that undermined their professional knowledge and independence.

Nationally, the results of the protest were significant. First, the protest sent an authoritative and compelling message to textbook publishers across the USA. Textbooks are cultural and economic commodities and there is an overriding imperative for publishers to sell their products in a highly competitive, unstable and changing market. Publishers work hard at ensuring that textbooks meet the demands of states and districts in which they are striving to sell their products. Consequently, the support of local and State textbook adoption committees has a substantial impact upon what gets written, published and used in schools. As a result of the Kanawha dispute authors, editors and publishers began to engage in forms of self-censorship. On this point Moffett claims that "No publisher has dared since 1974 to put out language arts or literature textbooks having the range of subject matter, points of view, and multicultural integrity as those attacked in Kanawha County" (Moffett 1989, 74). Since the Kanawha dispute American publishers have increasingly published school textbooks that are anodyne, uncontroversial and unremittingly and vigorously critiqued by a plethora of politically and religiously motivated interest groups (Altbach et al. 1991; Apple & Christian-Smith 1991 (eds.); Hein & Selden 2000 (eds); Loewen 1995; Foster & Crawford 2006 (eds.); Crawford & Foster 2007).

Second, the dispute brought to the fore fundamental questions that continue to resonate in many parts of the world regarding how the school textbook can be seen by ideologically and politically motivated groups as a vehicle through which to educate and liberate or to indoctrinate and impede. Here Lässig writes that while our awareness of the role of competing interests in the social construction of what constitutues official memory is developing little consideration has been given to the fact that "... different discourses are constantly being established, and that a simple top-down model - i.e., from the government straight to the classroom - would be an analytical framework for authoritarian systems at best" (Lässig 2009, 13). Lässig makes an important point because it is often less problematic to understand how in authoritarian systems legitimatised textbook knowledge is constructed. In what we label liberal democratic societies the process is more complex, diverse and diffuse particularly where there are nations within nations or where powerful regional variations in culture, economy and society counteract the hegemonic motives and intentions of an elite. Nevertheless despite this complexity the results are every bit as significant, and potentially damaging, as they are in authoritarian and totalitarian societies.

The Kanawha experience suggests that we need to move beyond rudimentary versions of state theory to closely explore ways in which the hegemonic intentions of the state are mediated within particular social contexts. This entails examining the processes of interpretation and meaning-making involving the identification of opposition, adaptation, deception and compliance as possible strategies within

unstable and differing contexts that provide opportunities for ideological and political factions to manoeuvre. The Kanawha dispute reminds us that the victors in hegemonic struggles are not always elites and that outcomes are not always those that might thought to be representative of widely accepted social, cultural and political norms. While there is a significant body of writing suggesting that textbooks in many nations represent the success of hegemonic battles waged by powerful and dominant groups, the Kanawha experience warns us to be careful about marginalising the processes through which at the local level elite motives and intentions can be resisted, mediated and re-interpreted.

The outcomes of the Kanawha dispute suggest that we need develop textbook theory and empirical studies within intermediate contexts, those sites occupying contested spaces between structural and political contexts and the micro-contexts of life in classrooms where textbook knowledge is filtered through sets of cultural, ideological and political screens. The Kanawha protesters occupied an intermediate context within what Bowe et al. call the 'context of text production' where policy texts are seen as “The outcome of struggle and compromise”(Bowe et al. 1992 19). Within this context the control of policy representation is problematic and “The key point is that policy is not simply received within this arena rather it is subject to interpretation and then ‘recreated’ … Parts of texts will be rejected, selected out, ignored, deliberately misunderstood, responses may be frivolous etc” (Bowe et al. 1992, 21).

In this case the struggle was between authors, publishers, educational bureaucrats and parental pressure groups all seeking influence over what should constitute legitimate curriculum knowledge; what claims to truth and knowledge are to be presented; who it is that selects school textbook knowledge; what voices are heard and whose knowledge is legitimised. Exploring intermediate contexts ought to critically map views from below in terms of the strategies and organisational forms that respond to changes within macro-level organisational structures and policy contexts. Such studies will enable us to explore the mystique of the prescriptive rhetoric of the prescribed curriculum and at least expose the notion that expertise, control and hegemonic power reside exclusively within government and educational bureaucracies.

Here concepts such as ‘moral panic’, ‘hegemony’, ‘authoritarian populism’ and ‘othering’ offer potential to explore in depth the very particular ways and sites in which the social construction of textbook knowledge is manufactured. We need more studies that explore local and regional reactions to dominant hegemonic aims and the emergence of hegemonic counter-cultures. We still know remarkably little about how textbook adoption happens at the level of local interaction; not so much in terms of policies and procedures which are well documented but in terms of the interplay between competing ideologies, values and perspectives and how they are worked out in practice.

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