

R. F. Mackenzie's 'Manifesto for the Educational Revolution'

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines R. F. Mackenzie's last extended analysis of Scottish education, 'Manifesto for the Educational Revolution', which was written in 1980 but not published at that time and only became available on the internet in 2003. Mackenzie's standing as a radical voice in Scottish education, offering an alternative account of the aims and values of schooling to the one promoted by the educational establishment, remains high among progressive educators: his legacy has been reviewed positively by commentators and several reunion and memorial events have taken place (see <http://www.rfmackenzie.info/>). The account offered here first provides a brief outline of his background and career, noting his links with other progressive educators (such as A. S. Neill and John Aitkenhead) and referring to some of the publications which predated the Manifesto. It then examines the content of the Manifesto, drawing attention both to its continuity with earlier themes and to the sharper edge to its critique of the political purposes of schooling. The section that follows seeks to go beyond the celebratory accounts of earlier commentators on Mackenzie by drawing attention to some tensions and limitations in his philosophy, while acknowledging the importance of his sustained challenge to orthodox educational thinking in Scotland and to the dominant narratives promoted by officialdom. A short conclusion sums up the nature of Mackenzie's radicalism.

INTRODUCTION

The crisis in Scottish schools is a crisis in Scottish life . . . Scotland's schools are at the centre of Scotland's perplexity, one of its main causes. They make little contribution to its cultural development, they are insulated from dealing with the problems of ordinary life. In their uniforms, discipline and discouragement of original thought they are authoritarian ... The democracy of Scottish education (and Scottish life) is a myth.

(R. F. Mackenzie, *The Unbowed Head*, 1977, p. 6)

Robert Fraser Mackenzie (1910-87) is regarded as an important figure in the history of Scottish education, representing a radical strand of thinking in opposition to the mainstream tradition. Although his career ended in suspension and effective dismissal from his post as headteacher of Summerhill Academy in Aberdeen, his liberal and progressive views on a range of topics - including the curriculum, examinations, corporal punishment, and the value of learning outside the classroom - have ensured that he continues to inspire those who

are disenchanted with conventional approaches to schooling. The details of the events leading up to Mackenzie's suspension, including the considerable public controversy they provoked, are not the principal focus of this paper: they are fully documented in Peter Murphy's life of Mackenzie (1998), as well as in Mackenzie's own *The Unbowed Head* (Mackenzie, 1977). Murphy's book has as its subtitle 'A Prophet Without Honour', suggesting that his contribution has been undervalued in Scotland and that he anticipated many needed reforms in the way in which education is conceived and the values it should represent. Mackenzie's name is often linked with two other progressive Scottish educators, A. S. Neill (1883-1973) and John Aitkenhead (1910-98), both of whom he knew and corresponded with (Croall 1983, 1984; Murphy, 1998). (See Note 1) However, unlike Neill and Aitkenhead, who established independent schools, Mackenzie spent most of his career working within the state sector in Scotland and this posed particular problems and challenges, which he set out in a series of publications, drawing on his experiences first at Braehead Junior Secondary School in Fife, and later at Summerhill in Aberdeen (Mackenzie, 1963, 1965, 1967, 1970, 1977). Mackenzie's last extended work on education, 'Manifesto for the Educational Revolution', was written in 1980 but it was turned down for publication at the time. After his death the text of this monograph was found among his papers and in 2003 his widow, Mrs D. C. Mackenzie, agreed that it should be made available on the internet (<http://www.rfmackenzie.info/html/manifesto.html>): an excerpt from it subsequently appeared under another title in *Scottish Review* (Mackenzie, 2004). A few passages are unclear and some sections may be incomplete, but the extant text extends to just under 40,000 words and there is certainly enough to form a view of his considered reflections on educational principles and practices. This paper seeks to examine the Manifesto, relating it to Mackenzie's earlier works and to scholarly appraisals of his educational legacy, with a view to assessing the relevance of his critique of Scottish education to present circumstances. How far have his predictions been borne out? Did the final statement of his educational philosophy represent a significant shift from earlier positions? And does Mackenzie's analysis of the connections between education, citizenship and democracy connect in any way with the current policy agenda?

Mackenzie was born in rural Aberdeenshire, where his father was a stationmaster, and his roots in the north-east remained a powerful influence and inspiration throughout his life (Murphy, 2005a). The home was God-fearing, evident in the formidable knowledge of the Bible which permeates Mackenzie's writings, but also tempered with encouragement by his father to work things out from first principles and think independently. This enquiring spirit, questioning 'common sense' assumptions, is a striking feature of all of Mackenzie's work and it is not hard to see how it would have brought him into conflict with educational bureaucrats (examiners, inspectors, local government officials) who were often more interested in systems and procedures, than with having to justify established practices. He had a successful school and university career, graduating in 1931. Although he taught briefly in the experimental Forest School in Hampshire between 1934 and 1936, he did not train as a teacher until after the Second World War, during which he served as an RAF navigator in Bomber Command. Throughout the 1930s he travelled

extensively in Europe, earning a modest living from journalism and tutoring, and witnessing the rise of the Nazi party in Germany at first hand. His RAF training also took him to Canada, the United States and South Africa, thus giving him an international perspective. After a spell teaching in the Borders, Mackenzie moved to Fife in 1952, first as Principal Teacher of English at Templehall School and then in 1957 as Headteacher of Braehead, a 'new' Junior Secondary School in Buckhaven, housed in a dilapidated old building. Junior secondary schools were designed for pupils who had failed their 'qualifying' examination (the Scottish equivalent to the English 11+) at the end of primary school, and offered a limited curriculum up to the (then) leaving age of 15. Mackenzie remained at Braehead for eleven years until the decision to close the school as part of comprehensive reorganisation was taken by Fife County Council. It was during this time that Mackenzie arguably carried out his most original and innovative work, supported by a committed and open-minded staff. His years at Summerhill (1968-74) were much more fraught, coming as they did at a time of expansion, the raising of the school leaving age and the introduction of comprehensive schools, all of which put serious strains on the system. Arguably the child-centred approach, which Mackenzie wished to promote, could only operate successfully on a small scale, where there was a real opportunity to devote time and attention to individual children. In a large comprehensive, which Summerhill became during his term of office as head, the scope for such attention was limited. Significantly, towards the end of his time at Braehead, when reflecting on the challenge of creating a 'sense of community', and making the school a social centre serving the wider community, he observed that 'in a big school the individual is swamped' (Mackenzie, 1967: 203).

In both Braehead and Summerhill Mackenzie tried to implement a progressive educational philosophy (Darling, 1994), which challenged the narrow academic focus of the school curriculum, the importance attached to formal examinations, and, perhaps most forcefully, the heavy emphasis on discipline and punishment when pupils showed any disinclination to submit to authority: 'the tradition of sin and punishment is deep in Scottish education' (Mackenzie 1977: 89). He developed his ideas in a series of books: *A Question of Living* (1963); *Escape from the Classroom* (1965); *The Sins of the Children* (1967); *State School* (1970); and *The Unbowed Head* (1977). These presented a humane vision of living and learning, in which the need to show compassion and understanding to children living in difficult circumstances was stressed, in which the value of learning outside the classroom was demonstrated, and in which opportunities for youngsters to engage in democratic processes were described. The books, unlike many academic studies of education, are engaging and readable, full of examples (some inspiring, others sad) of real episodes in the lives of pupils, parents and teachers. They are also remarkably honest, acknowledging events that could have been handled better, and admitting in retrospect that some decisions may have been mistaken.

Certain recurring themes are evident in the early books: the difficulty of undertaking experimental work within the state system; the damaging consequences of the Calvinist tradition, especially its intolerance of deviation from the norm; the narrow mindset of inspectors and administrators; the liberating effect of taking children away from the classroom and giving them first-hand experience of open spaces,

the world of nature and living cooperatively. This last point is particularly important. Some of the most passionately-expressed passages in Mackenzie's whole output describe the work he and his colleagues undertook with pupils, first based at a cottage in Rannoch and later at a shooting-lodge in Inverlair near Lochaber, which they hoped to convert into a permanent base for the use of groups of pupils throughout the school year. The (ultimately unsuccessful) attempt to overcome technical, financial and bureaucratic problems relating to the latter project surfaces many times and testifies both to Mackenzie's tenacity in the face of setbacks and to the timid, risk-averse attitude of many officials and councillors. Mackenzie was very fortunate in having on his staff at Braehead, Hamish Brown, who led many of the expeditions to the Highlands. Brown was an experienced mountaineer and became the first full-time outdoor specialist teacher in Scotland. He later recounted his work with Mackenzie and pupils at Braehead in *The Last Hundred* (1995), celebrating what had been achieved but regretting the loss of nerve by officialdom.

Mackenzie's publications attracted interest and support from a variety of quarters. The writer, Gavin Maxwell, wrote an Introduction to *Escape from the Classroom*, and also gave Braehead pupils the use of a cottage near his house in the Highlands. Harry Reid, Education Correspondent and later Editor of *The (Glasgow) Herald*, wrote Forewords to both *The Unbowed Head* and to Peter Murphy's biography of Mackenzie. The investigative journalist and political campaigner, Paul Foot, was also an enthusiastic supporter of Mackenzie (Foot, 1965). Edward Blishen, who edited the much-admired collection *The School That I'd like* (1969), giving children's views on their education, advised Mackenzie on the compilation *State School*, which brought together excerpts from his three previous books. Mackenzie's final book, *A Search for Scotland* (1989), which was not principally about education, had a Preface by the historian T. C. Smout. And James D. Young's study of Scottish political radicals, provocatively entitled *The Very Bastards of Creation* (1996), included a chapter on Neill and Mackenzie, who together represented 'our real radical educational history' (Young, 1996: 261). Young also described Mackenzie as 'one of the great socialist-humanist radicals of [the twentieth] century' (ibid: 281). As recently as November 2010, Robin Harper MSP, paid tribute to Mackenzie's achievements in the Scottish Parliament during a debate on Curriculum for Excellence (Scottish Parliament, 2010).

The few existing commentaries on Mackenzie might be described as celebratory, in the sense that they are strongly supportive of his attempts to change attitudes and practices in schools, and keen to assert his significance in the recent history of Scottish education (see, e.g. Forrest, 1988; Murphy, 2005b). Murphy, for example, describes him as 'the most charismatic, forward-looking Headteacher of his generation' (Murphy, 1998: 116-117). Gordon (1988), while broadly sympathetic to what Mackenzie was trying to do, enters some qualifications. He describes Mackenzie as 'a radical . . . an iconoclast and an optimist' (Gordon, 1988: 39) but suggests that his 'rhetorical and persuasive' style (ibid: 32) relies too much on emotion and not enough on logic: 'his writing is highly personal, experiential and largely innocent of rigorous conceptualisation' (ibid: 33). He suggests that Mackenzie asks many valid questions about the existing educational system but that his answers and proposals for reform are not entirely convincing, relying as they

do on a highly optimistic view of human nature and a dubious belief in the power of schools to change society: 'Schools alone have never been the agents of wholesale social reform and even if schools were perfectible, people are not' (ibid: 39).

Mackenzie is unapologetic about rejecting the notion that human beings are 'miserable sinners who need compulsion before they will reach any state of grace' (Mackenzie, 1965: 167). On the contrary he states: 'I believe that human nature is generally good, that human beings react generously to conditions of freedom and that therefore teachers doing experimental work in education would be wise not to try and "mould" children into some shape but to help them to grow in freedom' (ibid: 167). This comes across most strongly in his accounts of the way youngsters usually behave well when they are given both freedom and responsibility, and escape from the constraints of school to climb hills, explore forests, canoe across lochs, and encounter flora and fauna at first hand. These descriptions take on a lyrical quality, reminiscent of the Romantic poets, as Mackenzie celebrates the 'sight and sound and touch and smell' (ibid., pp. 143-144) of the natural world. Elsewhere he suggests that 'One of the most serious ailments of education is due to the banishing of the senses' (Mackenzie, 1963: 130) and that it is important to convey the value of simple things, 'land and water, sun and rain and wind and ice' (ibid: 75). There is a missionary zeal in his desire to make knowledge come to life: 'I wanted the pupils to know their own country at first hand and to know something about its past' (Mackenzie 1965: 131). For some, this will seem a retreat from the realities of industrial Fife to which the pupils had to return, but for Mackenzie it represented an insight into 'a larger life' marked by 'a generosity . . . a confidence and a feeling that there is no problem we couldn't cope with' (ibid: 152).

A Search for Scotland (1989) was published after Mackenzie's death. As well as showing his profound knowledge of the geographical and historical character of all parts of Scotland, it contains serious reflections on the cultural condition of the country and what he sees as the impediments to real progress. Smout in his Foreword observes: 'His rage is at the inhumanity of forms of human authority – the family authority, academic authority, bureaucratic authority' (Mackenzie, 1989: 4). There is an elegiac quality to some passages, combining as they do Mackenzie's deep love of his native country (its people, its landscape, its heritage) with a deep despair about the prospects for the social revolution he so longed for. Education is not the central theme, though he draws on the experiences recounted in earlier books to meditate on what he sees as 'the stagnation of Scottish life at the end of the twentieth century' (ibid: 52). Near the end he says:

A revolution in child rearing is essential to a widespread cultural change. Without it there will be no rule of the majority, that is to say no democracy. With it there will be a new perception of the nature of intelligence and a fusion of thinking and feeling into a deeper understanding; a new perception of how to live our lives; and the healing (the making whole) of our sorely riven society. (ibid: 263)

For Mackenzie, the key indicator of the moral quality of a society is the way it treats its children and young people. It was his conviction that professional and political leaders, and the institutions they controlled, had failed in their responsibility to the young that led him, in retirement, to write the Manifesto.

MANIFESTO FOR THE EDUCATIONAL REVOLUTION

Near the beginning of the Manifesto Mackenzie recalls an event which occurred when he was a young man undergoing training as an RAF navigator in South Africa. He was walking along a track near Grahamstown when he heard someone singing intermittently ahead of him. He caught up with the singer, a Zulu who was slightly drunk, and the two walked on together: sometimes the Zulu spoke and sometimes he resumed his singing. Then he made a comment which, many years later, resonated with Mackenzie: 'Once I believed that Jesus would make everything all right. I don't believe it any more.' Mackenzie explains: 'This book is a story of a comparable discovery.' (Mackenzie, 1980: 5) The Manifesto, at one level, is an account of progressive disillusionment with the beliefs that Mackenzie was brought up to subscribe to, and the institutions that he was encouraged to respect. He develops his account with reference to the 'three priesthoods' of religion, education and politics, all of which, he argues, promise much but fail to live up to the ideals they claim to represent. (He mentions law as a fourth priesthood but has very little to say about it and it will not feature in the discussion that follows.)

In *The Unbowed Head* Mackenzie states explicitly that he is not a Christian (Mackenzie, 1977: 77) but it is evident from all his writings that Christian ethics underlie the compassion and humanity which he tried to exemplify in his professional work. There are many references to the Bible, particularly in relation to charity and forgiveness. These are also evident in the Manifesto but they are used to draw attention to the gulf between the rhetoric and the reality of institutionalised religion. Mackenzie gives an account of his early experiences of attending various Protestant churches seeking spiritual enlightenment and understanding of concepts such as the Trinity. Occasionally ministers had something interesting to say: mostly, however, 'it was words without an attached sense of reality' (Mackenzie, 1980: 19). Gradually he concluded that the incomprehensibility which he experienced was not due to lack of interest or intelligence on his part, but was the intended outcome of practices which were designed to promote compliance to various forms of authority. Throughout history he argues, religion was used as an instrument to justify and sustain social divisions and differential power. He acknowledges that there are radical voices within the various Christian churches, people of independent spirit who are prepared to question orthodoxy: even when subject to criticism from their own hierarchies, such people 'continue steadfast to live justly and love mercy and walk humbly and bear witness to the same light that the rest of us, outwith their communities, are seeking to follow' (ibid: 21). But the power of religious institutions, expressed through ritual and tradition, often in association with other establishment agencies (such as royalty and parliament), ensures that dissent is easily contained.

In developing his critique of religion, Mackenzie cites poets and writers who have influenced his thinking, including William Blake, John Masefield, Matthew Arnold, Peter Kropotkin and Arthur Koestler, and have enabled him to see through the illusions propagated by religion. He concludes: 'I discovered that once I had escaped from half a lifetime's indoctrination of reverence towards the existing priesthoods and their insufficient and unsatisfying explanations, there was a feeling almost of

exhilaration, of relief at being free of the burden of having to try and reconcile my inmost thoughts and feelings with the prevailing doctrines. Everything, everything, was open for reconsideration' (ibid: 25).

A similar intellectual journey can be seen in his account of his questioning and rejection of the educational orthodoxies he was introduced to at school and university. He starts by commenting on the information he was expected to acquire at school, giving examples from history, geography, English literature and Latin. He questions its meaning and value: 'I look back on my educational career, littered with information like a road littered with pages from books that have fallen off a lorry' (ibid: 8). Echoing his critique of the failure of the curriculum to connect learning and living – the central theme of his first book *A Question of Living* – he regrets the missed opportunity to connect knowledge to the experiences, thoughts and feelings of youngsters in the north-east of Scotland. At Robert Gordon's College in Aberdeen the focus was on 'mental exercises for their own sake' (ibid: 11). 'Non-academic' subjects such as art, music, technical and physical education were accorded little value, indeed regarded by many teachers as 'an unnecessary and unjustifiable break in the continuity of word-smithing, the manipulation of word-symbols or numbers for their own sake' (ibid: 11). At Aberdeen University Mackenzie enjoyed classes in Zoology and Political Economy, taught by professors who could make their subjects come to life. But, he suggests, this was the exception, with too many lecturers offering courses that were no more engaging than the sermonising of ministers. He notes the docility of his fellow-students, disinclined to challenge or even to ask questions: 'A university should exist to combat mental defeatism and apathy, not to reinforce it' (ibid: 12).

Mackenzie acknowledges that many of his teachers and lecturers, at an individual level, were decent people, doing their best to humanise a system which they had inherited, a system which was fearful of change and staunch in its defence of formal examinations in traditional disciplines. But there were distinct limits to their open-mindedness, subject as they were to institutional constraints and the pressures of professional socialisation by colleagues. Like their students, teachers and lecturers had come to accept a series of mechanisms of control. Mackenzie concludes his reflections on his own education with a passage that has implications far beyond questions of curriculum content or pedagogic style:

This journey into the interior of education showed me how it is powered. I had been aware of its faults and strove to make improvements because I believed that at heart it was sound. I know now that I was mistaken. At its heart it is not sound. The commodity it is merchandising is Authority, and the teachers, like the commercial advertisers, are the hidden persuaders using subliminal, quasi-religious concepts to assure pupils and parents that their salvation lies in the worship of Authority, in accepting the Law, in preferring the judgements of this 'revealed' religion above their own unlettered thoughts.

(ibid: 16)

To understand Mackenzie's interpretation of the motives of those who regard education primarily as an instrument of control it is necessary to consider what he has to say about 'the political priesthood'. This extends over several chapters and

includes an analysis of educational developments in post-revolutionary Russia, the United States and other Western countries. Viewed from a post-Thatcher and post-New Labour perspective, the account seems dated, but it nevertheless gives an insight into Mackenzie's linking of education, society and politics. He argues that the great promise of the founders of the Labour Party to re-make the world based on justice and equality has not been fulfilled: 'It failed because it was cradled in a capitalist system of education' (ibid: 32). Drawing parallels between the treatment of natives by British colonialists and the treatment of Scottish working-class pupils by policy makers, he claims 'Labour MPs have been part and parcel of imposition and maintenance of this apartheid' (ibid: 34). Comprehensive schools, far from liberating those pupils who were previously consigned to junior secondaries, have merely made 'the traditional Tory curriculum and view of society available to a larger number of working-class children' (ibid: 34). Many teachers have collaborated in this process, not least those from modest backgrounds who, having achieved social advancement themselves, are content to maintain the old divisions between academic and non-academic, managers and workers, leaders and led. To bring about real change in society, suggests Mackenzie, would require working-class pupils to be taught the true facts of political life, the reality of power and patronage, of deceptive rhetoric and calculated misinformation. This would require schools to become genuinely democratic institutions, where free and open discussion of important issues would be allowed to take place. It would also help to transform them from the prisons and factories with which schools are sometimes compared (Hargreaves, 1994: 43).

Mackenzie reviews the early promise of educational reform in Russia under Lenin, when for a time freedom to experiment was encouraged in the belief that a revitalised educational system would promote 'a change in the nature of man' (Mackenzie, 1980: 49) from selfish individualism to collective solidarity. He approves of the emphasis on community values over materialism, and argues for a better understanding of the 'social anthropology' of schooling (ibid: 52), making connections between classroom practices and the environments which children encounter at home and in the community. However, he acknowledges that the attempt to liberate Russian education was short-lived, and under Stalin schooling reverted to formality, discipline and hierarchy, and was used as a brutal instrument of intellectual control and a selection mechanism for entry to the higher levels of the party machine.

In the West, Mackenzie argues, the pattern was similar though less crude in its manifestations. He detects two short-lived periods when reform seemed possible, the 1930s when various experimental schools (including Neill's) attracted interest, and the 1960s, when a cultural revolution, evident in popular music, fashion, sexual behaviour and student protest, seemed to be taking place. However, 'Neither in Britain nor the USA did the work of the pioneers have much effect on the schools. Nor did the educational experimentation conducted by the West [in the 20th century] have much impact on its political system' (ibid: 58). Forms of control in the West were more subtle and sophisticated than those in Russia, but the 'facade of liberalism and freedom' (ibid: 59) was quickly replaced by a more oppressive style in the face of unrest. In Scotland, the 'genial, cultured tone of the official reports that

appeared in the immediate post-war period' (ibid: 59) was replaced by '1984-type language' (ibid: 59), evident in the Pack Report on truancy and indiscipline (SED, 1977). The Pack Report was a response to teacher concerns about a perceived increase in disruptive behaviour by pupils and a call for more effective sanctions: its recommendations would have been seen by Mackenzie as a continuation of the old authoritarian tradition rather than a bold attempt to move in a new, more enlightened, direction.

The American economist J. K. Galbraith is cited by Mackenzie in support of his analysis of the way in which schooling is used to exclude and control the majority from full participation in democracy. It is convenient for political leaders to maintain the myth that the business of government is too complicated for ordinary citizens to appreciate what is involved in statecraft. This leads to the use of skilful techniques of indoctrination designed to produce compliance and docility in the majority of the populace. Mackenzie notes that Galbraith says that the supreme expression of the use of power occurs 'when the person does not know that he or she is being controlled ... Belief makes submission not a conscious act of will but a normal, natural manifestation of the approved behaviour. Those who do not submit are deviant' (Galbraith, quoted in Mackenzie, 1980: 69 – see Note 2). The various 'priestcrafts' (a variant of Mackenzie's earlier term 'priesthoods'), consciously or unconsciously, collude in the process of defining 'normal' and 'deviant' behaviour, and discouraging the kinds of questions that might lead to a proper appreciation of the way society functions. Mackenzie concludes: 'No society is likely to live happily when three quarters of its pupils and of its adults are excluded from full participation in the understanding of its culture and its government, when culture and government are esoteric studies, a priestly preserve' (ibid: 64).

So what exactly is the nature of the 'revolution' that Mackenzie proposes? It includes elements which verge on the mystical, as in the following passage:

The educational revolution has to do with the whole nature of our life on earth. Its sources of inspiration, the deep springs from which it draws its life, are the inner promptings of the human heart, the vague questions, the doubts, often unspoken, that have troubled humanity throughout its tenure of the planet.

(ibid: 61)

This is consistent with the emphasis in Mackenzie's earliest writings on the importance of the senses, not just in appreciating the natural world, but also in responding to impulses and intuitions which are not reducible to words, not adequately captured by verbal symbols. The personal search for meaning in life, the desire for growth and development, the need to find outlets for imagination and creativity, are all examples of human aspiration which Mackenzie feels are inadequately reflected in the work of schools. But he also tries to give more concrete form to his programme of renewal. He makes a strong plea for much greater intelligibility in what is taught. Instead of ritualised incantations meaningful only to members of the educational priesthood, he calls for activities that make sense to all learners and for an end to 'the artificial apartheid' of separating 'the artistic from the intellectual, the dreamers from the hard realists, the thinkers from doers' (ibid: 65). As part of this, he sees value in encouraging research into the

nature of comprehension and incomprehension. It is no surprise that he wants to abolish examinations which he calls 'the Bastille of the old regime' (ibid: 65). Parents should be more centrally involved in their children's education, linking what happens in school to the home, the workplace and the wider community, thereby encouraging democratic involvement in civic affairs. The perceptions of parents on the inadequacies of their own experience of schooling would also provide valuable insight into what needed to be changed.

Anticipating the technological revolution, Mackenzie wants much more use to be made of film and other media, thereby helping to reduce 'the unintelligibility that at present clouds our word-based education' (ibid: 66). This could bring to life issues in history, geography and politics that remain inert if presented only via textbooks and exposition by teachers. A degree of prescience is also evident in the importance he attaches to understanding of other countries and the value of pupil exchanges. The term 'global citizenship' is a fairly recent coinage but it is a concept Mackenzie might well have supported, provided it did not simply take the form of promoting a world-view that served the interests of governments and multi-national companies. There would have to be plenty of scope for critical questioning as part of the process.

The Manifesto, in common with Mackenzie's earlier works, reveals a man with a largeness of vision and a generosity of spirit that stands in sharp contrast to the mindset conveyed by most official reports on education. The latter are usually written within the well-established parameters of bureaucratic language, giving more weight to procedural than substantive matters, and disinclined to engage in fundamental questioning of existing practices. For Mackenzie, 'everything was open for reconsideration' and this inevitably meant that he was seen as a threat to policy makers and professionals alike, disturbing their self-image as benevolent providers of a service (schooling) that acted as a public good. His argument that for the majority of pupils, even after comprehensives replaced the old division between junior and senior secondaries, the experience of schooling was largely irrelevant and often alienating, was bound to provoke a reaction. A familiar process of isolating, marginalising and discrediting someone regarded as subversive then took place, bringing into alliance all those whose assumptions and routines were being questioned. It was an uneven contest and the outcome was inevitable. Nevertheless, nearly fifty years after Mackenzie's first book was published, his writing continues to engage readers in a way that most policy documents do not. That is not to say, however, that all his arguments are entirely persuasive or that his ideas should not be subject to the kind of critical scrutiny that he directed against official thinking. In the next section, an attempt will be made to identify and analyse the limitations as well as the strengths of Mackenzie's philosophy.

THE STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF MACKENZIE'S RADICALISM

Mackenzie's position as a 'radical' educator is merited on several grounds. He wanted not only to reform the curriculum and humanise the pedagogy of schools, but also to reconceptualise the aims of education, the relationship between schooling and society, and indeed to transform the political order in Scotland and beyond. He would have agreed with T. C. Smout who, writing only a few years after the completion of the Manifesto, observed:

It is in the history of the school more than in any other aspect of recent social history that the key lies to some of the more depressing aspects of modern Scotland. If there are in this country too many people who fear what is new, believe the difficult to be impossible, draw back from responsibility, and afford established authority an exaggerated respect, we can reasonably look for an explanation in the institutions that moulded them.

(Smout, 1986: 229)

Much of Mackenzie's analysis is entirely consistent with this view. He believed that school systematically and crudely categorised pupils into successes and failures, labelled them in a way that, for the majority, diminished their potential, treated dissent as evidence of their second-class status, provided little scope for the development of initiative, and failed to make meaningful links between the work of the school and what happened in wider society. Some of the issues that concerned Mackenzie have certainly been ameliorated since the time of his death. Young people are treated less harshly than was often the case during his time as headteacher and corporal punishment was abolished in Scottish schools in 1982 (but only after some parents took their case to the European Court of Human Rights). On the other hand, the tentacles of the examination system have extended ever more widely in the belief that worthwhile knowledge and skills can always be reduced to a series of defined experiences and outcomes. The curriculum has undergone several revisions, most recently in the form of Curriculum for Excellence (Scottish Executive 2004, 2006; Scottish Government, 2009), but it is highly doubtful if he would have endorsed a re-shaping that still gives pride of place to traditional academic subjects and tends to regard anything other than classroom learning as a cultural supplement rather than an essential ingredient of human development (see Priestley & Humes, 2010). As for the four capacities of Curriculum for Excellence (successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors, responsible citizens), the likelihood is that he would dismiss them as merely the latest example of feel-good, meaningless rhetoric, designed to give the illusion that something significant was changing. Despite some adjustments to the surface configuration of Scottish education, its traditional differential distribution of power and prestige remains (Humes, 2008).

In terms of starting the 'cultural revolution' Mackenzie so ardently desired, then, he must be judged to have failed and it is important to ask why this has been the case. Simply by posing this question, Mackenzie's supporters may feel that his legacy is being adversely judged. That is not the intention: he remains a powerful symbolic figure, along with Neill and Aitkenhead. But if the radical tradition is to resurface and make a renewed assault on the orthodoxies of Scottish education, it must try to learn lessons from the past, even if some of them are rather uncomfortable.

Part of the reason that Mackenzie's hope for a revolution was unfulfilled is that his philosophy was out of touch with the spirit of the times. The return of a Conservative government under Margaret Thatcher in 1979 meant that the scene was set for decades of educational policy formulated by New Right and New Labour thinking, which was deeply antithetical to the child-centred principles espoused by Mackenzie. The discourse of standards, targets and accountability quickly gained ascendancy over progressive notions of freedom, interest and imagination.

Moreover, the general cultural climate, which gave free reign to materialism and consumerism, was directly at odds with everything Mackenzie held dear and seemed to confirm his view that the decline of religion had left a spiritual vacuum. Against this background, the prospect of schools being able to trigger a major ideological shift was remote. The American sociologist, Christopher Jencks, had published a major research study in 1972 arguing that schools cannot compensate for society: the form of education was shaped by wider social and economic forces which conspired to perpetuate inequality (Jencks, 1972). In Gordon's assessment of Mackenzie's legacy, mentioned earlier, he made a similar point when he suggested that Mackenzie overestimated the capacity of schooling to bring about change (Gordon, 1988).

In addition, although Mackenzie was alert to many of the self-interested strategies employed by the various 'priesthoods' he describes in the Manifesto, he nonetheless underestimated the power of educational bureaucracy. The history of state education in Scotland is a story of institutional expansion and professional protectionism, consolidated and extended over many decades, and modified as circumstances required (Paterson, 2003; Humes, 2000). In fairness to Mackenzie, understanding how the fiction of disinterested stewardship by a benign leadership class was maintained was not generally appreciated until research studies exposing the techniques used in ensuring the 'management of consent' were published in the 1980s (Humes, 1986; McPherson and Raab, 1988). Mackenzie acknowledges that his own awareness of the deceptions of policy makers was a slow and gradual process. For a long time he continued to believe that genuine reform from within a system that placed authority above democracy was possible.

One of the main obstacles Mackenzie encountered was the deep conservatism of the Scottish teaching profession. In his writing he has some harsh things to say about the three main teacher unions he had to deal with (the Educational Institute of Scotland, the Scottish Secondary Teachers Association, and the Scottish Schoolmasters Association). Within the teaching staff at Summerhill there was a deep divide between the majority who opposed Mackenzie's reform programme, which challenged the routine use of corporal punishment and questioned the value of traditional curriculum content, and a significant minority who supported him. One of his complaints against Aberdeen Education Committee was that it appointed him in full awareness of his philosophy but gave him staff who were hostile to his approach. The committee, in turn, accused Mackenzie of failing to take his staff with him and of showing poor leadership. These claims and counter-claims, somewhat ironically, are still reflected in current policy debate. There is talk of reducing the role of local government in the provision of educational services and giving more freedom to headteachers: at the same time the discourse of leadership is frequently invoked in discussions of educational management, suggesting a desire to devolve responsibility but not necessarily power.

A specific issue on which Mackenzie failed to persuade many teachers and parents, as well as central and local government, was his consistent opposition to examinations. The examination system, he asserts, not only inhibits genuine enquiry: 'it inspires boredom; it impedes experiment and progress; it enslaves the curriculum; it ignores real values; it measures useless information; it ignores

character' (Gordon, 1988: 39). What is missing is any sustained discussion of the practical implications of abolishing exams (see, e.g., Mackenzie, 1977: 55). What would be the consequences for entry to further and higher education and employment? Imperfect though they undoubtedly are, it can be argued that examinations provide a more 'objective' form of assessment than the individual recommendations of teachers: they also reduce the scope for influence and patronage, which might flourish under an unregulated system. Again, if schools in different localities pursued very different curricula, unimpeded by the requirements of national examinations, what would happen when families moved from one part of the country to another? Might it be the case that some youngsters would face serious problems of transition? In failing to consider these questions, Mackenzie makes it easier for his critics to dismiss his ideas as idealistic and impractical.

His critical comments on the teacher unions are related to what he has to say about the Labour Party. There is disappointment at the failure of Labour politicians to live up to the ideals of the early socialists. They have been absorbed into the traditional power structures, with their concern for status and rewards. Similarly, teachers, many of whom came from ordinary backgrounds and started off with well-intentioned motives to improve opportunities for other working-class youngsters, were soon assimilated into the prevailing norms which gave priority to order and discipline over understanding and compassion. The price of upward mobility was abandonment of reforming aspirations. Interestingly, Mackenzie says that some of his most open-minded teachers came from outside Scotland: they had not acquired the siege mentality or the defensive professionalism that characterised many of their Scottish counterparts. Such a view would have provoked an alliance between parties that in other circumstances would have seemed unlikely bedfellows – unions and management, politicians and parents. Anyone who questions the fundamental tenets of the 'Scottish educational tradition', with its (until recently) unswerving belief in its superiority over English education and its unquestioning worship of the God of professionalism, is bound to find himself increasingly isolated. Although Mackenzie had some doughty supporters who advanced thoughtful arguments in his support, they were not the power-brokers who made the decisions. This suggests a degree of political naivety on the part of Mackenzie. He should also have learned from the experience of Michael Duane (1915-97), a progressive head teacher of a London comprehensive school (Risinghill), who adopted a non-authoritarian approach and faced serious difficulties with London County Council and Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools, eventually leading to closure of the school (Berg, 1968; Limond, 2005). Duane was in regular contact with A. S. Neill and Neill mentioned him in letters to Mackenzie (see, e.g. Croall, 1983: 28).

Another aspect of Mackenzie's thinking that merits scrutiny is what might be called a vein of anti-intellectualism which runs through all his writing, though there are contradictions in his stance. He himself had a conventional academic education at Robert Gordon's College and Aberdeen University and this is reflected both in his commitment to the written word as a vehicle for promoting his ideas and in the impressive range of religious, literary and historical references he employs in his books. At the same time, he is hostile towards mere verbal cleverness and the slick manipulation of abstract concepts which fail to engage with lived reality. He cites

Paulo Freire as an example of a radical educator who resists the 'domestication' of traditional approaches to learning, but does not follow through the implications of what Freire has to say about the links between language and power (Freire, 1972a; 1972b). For Freire, a developing command of language was a vital element not only in acquiring a sense of personal identity but also in being able to ask those questions which would provide insights into political and economic structures and processes. There are, moreover, some surprising omissions from Mackenzie's reading, The Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), whose ideas were much discussed in the 1960s and early 1970s, would have presented an interesting challenge to Mackenzie, arguing as he did that in order to transform society it was necessary to equip working-class youngsters with the intellectual tools which only a traditional education could provide: Gramsci's belief in 'traditional pedagogy for radical politics' represented an alternative response to the kinds of issues that concerned Mackenzie (Entwistle, 1979). Writers who do receive a favourable mention include Brian Jackson and Dennis Marsden, whose 1962 book *Education and the Working Class* became a classic, and Richard Hoggart, a sociologist and cultural theorist, author of the highly-regarded *The Uses of Literacy* (1957) (Mackenzie, 1965: 173-176).

There seems, however, to be a degree of arbitrariness in the sources that Mackenzie invokes, particularly in the Manifesto where a 1911 book (Mackenzie gives the date as 1912) written by a retired English inspector of schools, Edmond Holmes, receives extended discussion and is held up for approval (Holmes, 1911: Shute, 1998). Opportunities to back up his case with better-known and more influential writers are missed. For example, on the subject of challenging the separation of 'learning' and 'living', the great American educator, John Dewey (1859-1952), would have provided many arguments in support of Mackenzie's position (Dewey, 1966). Dewey, admittedly a 'progressive' rather than a 'radical', challenged various 'dualisms' which he felt fragmented human experience: mind and body; work and leisure; knowledge and experience; character and intelligence; discipline and interest. He also attached great value to the ability to *apply* knowledge not simply *acquire* it. It is unlikely that Mackenzie was unaware of Dewey's writings but he may have been put off them by Neill's opinion that he was 'dull' and 'long-winded' (Croall, 1983: 36). Dewey was certainly not the most elegant of writers but he offered a strong intellectual basis which would have supported some of the ideas Mackenzie was trying to promote.

Again, the principles underpinning Jerome Bruner's innovative curriculum experiment Man: A Course of Study (MACOS), carried out in the United States in the 1960s would certainly have been of interest to Mackenzie, but he does not mention it at any point. The MACOS programme was framed round three basic questions: What is human about human beings?; How did they get that way?; How can they be made more so? (Bruner, 1968). It had five ideals that were entirely consistent with Mackenzie's philosophy:

- To give our pupils respect for and confidence in the powers of their own mind
- To extend that respect and confidence to their power to think about the human condition, man's plight and his social life

- To provide a set of workable models that make it simpler to analyze the nature of the social world in which we live and the condition in which man finds himself
- To impart a sense of respect for the capacities and humanity of man as a species
- To leave the student with a sense of the unfinished business of man's evolution.
(Bruner, 1968: 101)

There were other writers who published their work around the same time who might have been mobilised in support of Mackenzie's radical agenda (Illich, 1970; Rubenstein & Stoneman; 1970 Postman & Weingarter, 1971; Holt, 1977). It is, of course, easy to say that wider reading might have strengthened the case Mackenzie was advancing: much of his time must have been occupied with the day-to-day demands of dealing with pupils, parents, staff and administrators. But a revolution requires many different skills – a clear vision, loyal supporters, good organisation, political awareness and intellectual strength. Few would doubt Mackenzie's courage, integrity and deep concern for the welfare of the youngsters in his care: sadly these were not enough to overcome the combined forces of professional resistance, press hostility, bureaucratic back-covering and political fear.

CONCLUSION

Mackenzie's radicalism involved examining fundamental questions about the nature of knowing and understanding; about what it means to be human; about the values which should be nourished in young people; about the nature of freedom and democracy. He wanted revolution rather than reform, and inevitably this brought him into conflict with existing political institutions: interestingly his wife Diana remarked that 'He got more and more radical the older he got' (quoted in Murphy, 1998: 151). While he was seen by some as simply naive and idealistic, he was seen by others as dangerous, challenging the function of schools as agencies of social control. His politics were undoubtedly of the left, but he became progressively disenchanted with the assimilation of Labour politicians into the rituals and traditions of the establishment. He belonged to the socialist tradition represented by John Maclean rather than that represented by Ramsay Macdonald: in *A Search for Scotland* he refers explicitly to these two figures, contrasting Maclean's original vision of socialism with the modified and compromised version pursued by Macdonald (Mackenzie, 1989: 259). He alternates between a feeling, on the one hand, that change must surely come soon, as the inadequacies of capitalism and consumerism become more apparent, and youthful resistance intensifies, and, on the other hand, despair that the forces of conformity are so well embedded in institutional structures, and so powerfully supported by the various priesthoods, that the prospects of achieving the major cultural shift he seeks, are doomed. In this sense, the Manifesto is as much a lament as a call to arms – a lament for what he saw as the deceptions of his own education, for the collusion of those who speak fine words of enlightenment but stop short of acting on them, for the lack of vision and cultural philistinism of the educational establishment, and, above all, for the system's failure to recognise and celebrate the potential of generations of Scottish youngsters who might have helped to make Scotland a much more generous, tolerant, life-affirming society than it currently is. Significantly, one of Mackenzie's favourite quotations was an

aphorism attributed to Ghandi: 'The thing I fear most is the hard-heartedness of the educated' (Murphy, 1998: 153).

In his Preface to Murphy's biography, Harry Reid acknowledges that Mackenzie could be 'difficult, cussed, and at times arrogant' but suggests that these characteristics were more than compensated for by his 'compassion . . . courage . . . and wonderful, zealous, engaging radicalism' (Murphy, 1998, Foreword: v). It is undoubtedly the case that anyone who seeks to start a revolution has to be assertive, willing to cause offence, and prepared to fight hard for what they believe in. It is not necessary to agree with everything that Mackenzie wrote and said to appreciate the value of the questions he posed or admire his attempt to take Scottish education in a different direction from the one preferred by politicians and administrators. Above all, he challenged the 'narrative privilege' of officialdom: that is, its power to promote a preferred version of events set out in ministerial statements and official reports, seeking to celebrate the achievements of the Scottish educational system and, by implication, those who exercise stewardship over it. In the final analysis, perhaps Mackenzie's most important contribution was his delineation of an alternative narrative, one that not only exposed the complacency of traditional assumptions and practices, but also served - and continues to serve - as a powerful symbol for those who still hope for the re-emergence of a radical tradition in Scottish education.

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Note 1: The work of A. S. Neill and his philosophy of freedom in education is well known, particularly as set out in his book *Summerhill* (Neill, 1968), one of many publications. John Aitkenhead published comparatively little and has been subject to much less critical attention. However, Andrew Pyle, the current head of the school which Aitkenhead founded in 1939 (Kilquhanity House, near Castle Douglas), is working on both an academic study of Aitkenhead's philosophy and practice (for a doctorate at the University of Strathclyde) and a biography of the man. Pyle has been given access to Aitkenhead's papers stretching over 60 years, including letters from Mackenzie and Neill. Kilquhanity is not currently a registered school in Scotland but it offers satellite provision for a progressive group of Japanese schools run by Shin-ichiro Hori, a disciple of Neill, whose books he has translated into Japanese. Once in the public domain, Pyle's research should add significantly to understanding of the radical tradition in Scottish education and, in particular, to the links between Aitkenhead, Neill and Mackenzie.

Note 2: Mackenzie gives the source of this reference as Galbraith's book *The Anatomy of Power* which was not published until 1983, three years after the bulk of the Manifesto was written. A likely explanation is that he continued to work on the text, adding some new material, after the first draft was completed in 1980. However, his attribution of sources is sometimes rather suspect and he often does not provide precise references.