



PART I

Emergence of an Enduring Theme

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THIS ESSAY WAS FIRST DELIVERED as a presentation to a seminar dealing with higher education in Sweden in 1990, and then published in a number of places, including a volume in honor of Seymour Martin Lipset. Lipset had been the principal author and organizer of the major study *Union Democracy*, in 1956, on which Trow and James Coleman collaborated and of which they became coauthors. In both their cases, it became the first book publication in distinguished careers. I mention this early connection with the work of Lipset because one sees in this essay a concern that activated the research that led to *Union Democracy* and the effort to understand the distinctiveness of American labor unions, and that is the significance of the absence of a tradition of a major socialist party in the United States. This was a topic with which Lipset dealt all his life but which Trow raised only on occasion, this presentation being one of them. And I mention the place of the first presentation of this paper, in Sweden, because I believe its original formulation for a non-American audience influenced its content and tone and emphases.

In particular, the presentation to a non-American audience led Trow to emphasize sharply the role of the hope and expectation of individual advancement in the United States, and how that hope and expectation affects American institutions and beliefs. This he presents in contrast with the greater role in European societies of socialist parties and movements working to advance the working class as a class. In America, in contrast, the ideal role of colleges and universities is to give opportunity to talented and ambitious individuals. The issue of the rise of the working class as result of educational opportunity simply is not on the agenda. Trow notes that “a culture is defined, in part, by what it feels guilty about. Western European nations, on the whole, feel guilty about their working classes . . . We as

The directions taken since 1987 show why the essay is still a point of reference in contemporary debates, especially in England. For someone like me, working in further education during the 1980s and searching for an analysis of English preoccupations, the essay was a turning-point. An essay that puzzled over “the manifest inequalities in the relationship of higher and further education” and the “envy and resentment” generated on one side and the “guilty defensiveness and snobberies” on the other was not obviously the product of an English mind. It spoke to a democratization of higher education that, under English conditions, was otherwise muted or missing.

—GARETH PARRY

Academic Standards and Mass Higher Education

I

In this essay* I want to reflect on standards in academic life, and the somewhat different question of the maintenance of high and roughly uniform academic standards across the whole range of degree-granting institutions in the United Kingdom. The first question—the issue of academic standards in a particular college or university—is one of the most important issues that an institution has to confront. Every college or university has to concern itself continually to maintain the highest levels of teaching, and in some, of research, that it can achieve. But the

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relationship between learning and society, or they can resist it. History will be making its own judgment of the part that the institutions of higher education will play in the postsecondary education of British society, and it will be an unforgiving one.

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