

a Better Answer

IF READERS will pardon the pun, Paul Goodman, the author of *Compulsory Mis-Education* (Horizon Press, \$3.95), is a really good man. But, as we shall see, he mistakes his natural friends for enemies, and he ends up by becoming lost between the two big camps that are contending for the control of the American educational system.

Being a man who can use his eyes and ears, he knows that the country is not getting its money's worth for the fantastic sums that are being spent on education. Great funds go to support scientific research, but in the past thirty years the average number of hours per week spent in classroom work by science teachers has dropped from nineteen to six. In huge educational factories, such as the University of California at Berkeley a common complaint is that a professor never really sees a student's paper; it is usually

read by a paid student reader who may or may not know what he is about. Yet a retired California English professor, George Stewart, who is a fine novelist and historian, insists that the ratio of teachers to students at Berkeley is not bad; students can get counsel and aid if they really ask for it. We must look elsewhere for the source of what is called the alienation of the student from the faculty. Hugh Kenner, who teaches at another branch of the University of California, the one at sun-drenched Santa Barbara, says the trouble with American education is that our schools and colleges are filled with boys and girls who should not be forced to hang on in hopes of getting degrees. They are there merely to mark time, and they keep real students from learning. In short, we need more dropouts, not fewer.

Paul Goodman agrees with Hugh Kenner that a "reasonable

social policy would be not to have these youth in school, certainly not in high school, but to educate them otherwise and provide opportunity for a decent future in some other way." The practical argument against such a social policy is, of course, that you have to have a degree—even an advanced degree—to hold down any sort of good job. Paul Goodman doesn't doubt that this is true, but he says it is a ridiculous state of affairs that is maintained by the stupidity of those in charge of hiring for big corporations. Naturally, he says, if a corporation insists that a youngster have a diploma, the correlation of schooling and employment is self-proving. Actually, the spread of automation means that most jobs are of such a nature that they can be done by people with no long background of schooling. The average job in General Motors' most automated plant, he says, requires only three weeks of training for people who have had no education whatever. And in the Army and Navy, complicated skills, such as radar operation, are taught on the job, sometimes to virtual illiterates.

A Problem of Degrees

Why, then, the rage to keep Johnny in school until he is twenty-two, or even twenty-five? Paul

Goodman suspects that it is because the unions don't want Johnny coming on the labor market as a teenager. He is obviously right about the unions' desire to limit the available work force, but this is not the primary reason for our national insistence on years and years of formal schooling. Mr. Goodman is closer to the mark in another context, when he talks about the "mass superstition" cultivated by our "school-monks," by which he means our "administrators, professors, academic sociologists, and licensees with diplomas who have proliferated into an invested intellectual class worse than anything since the time of Henry the Eighth." It is the "school-monks" who have set themselves up as "indispensable mentors for creativity, business-practice, social work, mental hygiene, genuine literacy—name it, and there are credits for it leading to a degree."

Because of our insistence on educational scaffolding and trappings and the parchment evidences of having spent time in school, the self-made man is becoming an impossibility in America simply because he is an "out" before he can even make a start. Mr Goodman recalls the time when the ninety-four per cent of Americans who did not finish high school were our future farmers, shopkeepers, millionaires, politicians, inventors,