Education Becomes World-Minded

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DURING WORLD WAR II the importance of education was demonstrated more strikingly than ever. One could justly say that this was a world war between two systems of education, and still more a war for the right to a certain kind of education.

On the one hand the Nazis in Germany as well as the Fascist leaders in Italy used education in very conscious ways in order to mould the next generation in the picture of Nazism and create a certain attitude toward life. The results of this "Education for Death" will outlast the Nazi party and will be one of the most difficult problems we shall have to face for years to come.

On the other hand the strong resistance movement in the Nazi-dominated countries during the occupation demonstrated with equal clarity the results of democratic education in these nations before the war. The strong and spontaneous action of the underground would hardly have been possible if the broad masses in each country had not themselves been able to carry on the democratic ideals and fight their own fight.

The Nazis well knew the value of this education, and it was only natural from their viewpoint that they should try to destroy it. School buildings in the occupied countries were frequently confiscated by the German soldiers and used as barracks. Universities and teachers colleges were closed so that no new teachers could be educated. Teachers were sent to concentration camps in great numbers, and many were executed. Nazi textbooks were introduced and the study of Nazism was forced into the schools as far as the Germans could manage it. Education became irregular and difficult.

But in spite of all the Nazi efforts education went on according to the same principles as before, carried on by the energy and enthusiasm of the children and young people themselves. From Norway, for instance, there are reports of how children spontaneously got together in groups to help each other with their school work after the schools had been closed and how education continued all the time even under the most adverse conditions. *The will to democratic education* was strong enough to conquer all difficulties.

With Clarity of Purpose

Whereas the young people of these countries have suffered under the Nazi occupation, they have also learned something that is worth learning and that they can now contribute to the world if opportunity is given. It is quite obvious that the youth in the once Nazi-occupied countries are behind in their academic studies and that these countries will need some help during the next few years to get their education in order again. It is difficult for them to get started properly. School buildings are bombed out or are at least totally out of repair. Books and teaching material are lacking. Teachers are not numerous enough. Three or four classes of new students want to enter the universities simultaneously. They need help. But they also have a message to convey to the world.

These young people have taken part in the resistance movements of a suppressed democracy; they clearly know what ideals the democratic world has fought for. They have faced the Nazis in concentration camps and prisons; they know what Nazism is in real life. They have carried on their young shoulders the responsibility of life and death

Education's international job is tremendous. It is, first, a job of ridding human minds of Nazi teachings and, second, a job of spreading understanding around the world. Aase Gruda Skard, formerly a specialist in child psychology in Norway and Sweden, has only to recall her own bitter experiences in fleeing before Hitler to comprehend the full extent of the task that lies ahead. Since late 1940, Mrs. Skard and her family have lived in Washington, D. C. Working tirelessly to promote international goodwill through education, she has lectured widely in this country and is now representing Norway in the International Educational Assembly.

for themselves and their friends. They have lived in scarcity and shortages of all kinds; they know how to appreciate the real values of life; they know what is worth living for—and dying for. They have seen men and women in danger and under terrible psychological pressure, have seen them master situations of the greatest suffering and sacrifice, or have seen them fail. They have seen human psychology when the soul is stripped naked of all the conventions of daily life. They have seen the strength of faith and conviction. They have an education that is different from what the schools can give in ordinary life; if they have missed much, they also gained something in return.

The overwhelming importance of education in the life of the world has been demonstrated in this underground fight with a clarity which we would hardly have believed possible a few years ago; and through this demonstration the idea of international understanding and its promotion through education has taken on a deeper meaning. It cannot be denied that in peacetime a program of mutual understanding might have a certain vagueness. We offered the new generation a kind of tourists' guide to foreign countries and their folkways which was interesting and colorful and definitely useful but often had little connection with the essentials of life. Now these connections are obvious, and the lines of demarcation clear. In the mutual give and take between the democratic nations which we now look forward to, the occupied countries of course do not monopolize the democratic idea; we all realize more deeply now what we have been fighting for. But our common struggle has put the work for international understanding on a sounder basis and given emphasis to the things that really count: not the size and wealth of nations, but the clarity with which they have grasped the democratic idea and the courage and self-sacrifice with which they have fought for it.

How Far Have We Come?

Already during the war a program for international understanding through education was discussed in this country. Particularly the series of pamphlets published by the International Education Assembly has been important in their contribution to the thinking in this field, both here and in other countries, and has helped in the establishment of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization.

What we can do in education to promote international understanding and democracy will roughy fall into two parts, viz., what we have to do within our own nations, and what we can do for other countries.

In this field, as so often, we have to start at home and look into the fundamentals of our own education first of all. Our education, even in the countries that have advanced farthest towards true democracy and international strivings, is still far from perfect. If one compares the general demands to such education as formulated in *Education for a Free Society* with the state of actual education as presented in the survey *Education in the United Nations*,[1] one feels that in all nations we still have a long way to go. How near we have come to the goals and how much is still left to be done cannot always be determined by such general comparison, but some examples may be quite revealing.

As a general principle it is stated that "every one should be educated." This does not mean for example, that the ability to read is the absolute demand for all education, or that a high degree of literacy necessarily means good education. But we can still use the demand for literacy as a kind of basic indication of the general state of education, since the ability to read is perhaps the most important tool in acquiring knowledge. Twenty-five countries are listed in the inquiry of illiteracy among the United Nations; of these, 20 report illiteracy to some degree, even as high as 88 per cent of the population, and only 5 countries report no illiteracy. Among the countries reporting some illiteracy are leading cultural nations such as Belgium with 8 per cent of the population illiterate (in 1930), Czechoslovakia with 3 per cent (1930), France with 3 per cent (1934), and U. S. A. with 4 per cent (1940). Compulsory education exists in most countries now, but many countries report that it is not enforced, "owing largely to economic conditions of the country" as it is explained from Greece.

Among the goals for a democratic society is one stating that "opportunities for advanced

[1] Both published by International Education Assembly, NEA, 1201 Sixteenth Street, N. W., Washington 6, D. C.

adult education should be ample and justly distributed." But the survey of the situation in different countries shows that a very low percentage of the population is likely to have advanced education. The figure 10 per cent seems to be most frequently mentioned—and in most countries this number is considerably lower for girls than for boys. Whereas free tuition is often provided and scholarships or other means of support may be found, we are still far from a situation in which advanced education is considered equal to other work done for the benefit to the nation and the individual and remunerated as such by the society. Iceland seems to come nearest to the ideal where "in the rural boarding high schools . . . the pupils pay nothing except for their food at very low price." But even there, it is still an economic problem to give up a paying job in order to get advanced education. If information were available indicating which groups of the population now get advanced education, one would certainly still find that in all nations financial background plays a great role, as well as the ability and willingness to profit from higher schooling. Little will be gained by preaching democracy internationally if our own education does not live up to our own principles.

How Far Can We Go?

One could go on comparing the ideals and the actual state in this way. Each nation is faced with the inescapable fact that much remains to be done and that we must all put in a great amount of work to ameliorate our own conditions. But we cannot limit ourselves to this task. We must also help each other along towards richer education and greater international goodwill. When we realize how much we have to give to each other we will also try to find practical ways to exchange our knowledge and experiences. This will be one of the purposes of the UNESCO. But even before this organization is fully working we can start the work, and as a matter of fact much is already being done.

The goal of providing advanced education for a higher number of young people can be greatly helped by international cooperation, e.g., through a program of grants from the nations who have financial resources that can be used for this purpose. Bringing students and other young people in need of more education to this country, for instance, is and will be, an enormous help to the nations who have suffered under Nazi occupation and destructive warfare and who are short of both school buildings, teaching material, and teachers. It will give to this youth the change of surroundings, the mental relaxation, the varied nourishment, and the opportunity for concentration on studies that they so badly need. And at that time these students will bring their own capital of knowledge and experiences to this country to be shared by their fellow students here.

We will hope that in the near future the program of grants can be changed into a program of real exchange of students, workers, and teachers so that we can learn to know even more about each other's countries.

Cooperation should also be promoted through the media of radio, films, newspapers, periodicals, books, and all other instruments of knowledge. Such activities have been started, but so far are only carried out on a very limited scale. A special program should be worked out for the cooperation and exchange of children's books in order to have more and better books translated. During childhood our main attitudes towards the world are formed, and books have an important part to play. But again one must keep in mind that good translations of good books are of use only if the general state of mind is sound. The seeds we can sow through good books will grow only if the soil is arable and ready for them. Children who are brought up under the pressure of dictatorial authority, who are frustrated and subdued, will very seldom profit to any measurable degree by a good book from any other country, even if they are allowed to read it.

The Nazi Must Go

This brings us to the problem of our responsibility towards the Nazi countries and the Nazi youth. It is appropriate to mention this problem *after* the problems of the youth from other countries. It is a much harder problem, and for the future of the world it is all-important that we find some kind of solution to it. But still, our thoughts must go *first* to the youth and the children who have already taken their share in building up and fighting for a democratic world.

Whatever we do, or whatever we leave to the Axis countries to do for themselves, it seems absolutely necessary that we keep some kind of control in order to check the Nazi tendencies in education. Before this war we all knew what was going on in the Nazi schools and youth organizations, but nobody could find anything to do about it. Perhaps we also underrated the importance of education and left it to our enemies to realize its full impact. We must not let anything like that happen again. All of us who have a democratic tradition in our educational systems are quite naturally scared by the idea of establishing an international supervision of what we are doing. But it is a question whether we should not rather sacrifice some of our national pride and submit ourselves to closer control, if by that means we could gain the moral right to supervise and influence what is going on in nations that have *not* the same democratic traditions. Such mutual inspection may even help to check budding Nazism within the education in countries that have so far been happily free of ostentatious manifestation of that kind.

Increased international cooperation will imply increased knowledge of what each one of the other nations is doing. In fact, international understanding is not possible without the open door. But this again will imply an intensified international discussion also of the problems of education within the different nations. We should hail such discussion with joy and show confidence enough to invite criticism of our national systems. As long as Nazi tendencies are non-existent in our education, discussion and criticism may be enough. But as soon as the arch-enemy of mankind appears in the education of any nation it should be our common responsibility to squelch it through our international organizations.

Our work for democracy and international understanding starts in our own homes and our own school systems, which must be developed according to the principles of human rights, individual opportunities, and social responsibility. It continues in our cooperation with and help to children and youth in other countries who are striving for the same ideals as ours. It must be followed up by international interference with Nazi currents in education through the strengthening of all our democratic international organizations. We cannot afford to display tolerance and liberty toward forces that are themselves fostering intolerance and slavery.

AT LONG LAST

Things are really popping in ASCD! First we plan a convention and then we change our name—as you will note elsewhere in this issue. Now to make our cup brim over, your national office has been moved to new quarters (no new street address, just a new room!). For the past few years we have had to work in very cramped space and we are quite proud of the fact that we have been able to achieve so much in so small an area. So pardon us if we throw out our chests a little, but we thought you would like to know that more elbow room will certainly mean increased production.

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