

The Changing World

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EDUCATION CAN SAVE FREEDOM

IT IS HIGH TIME educators made a careful analysis of the problem of saving our freedom. We should know how freedom can be saved. We should know what forces are working to preserve our freedom and which ones can bring about its destruction. We should have a vigorous program of action. We can save freedom through education if we are alert and if we know what we are doing. But we must do more than emphasize generalities. We must help children and older people to acquire the understandings and attitudes which will enable them to make freedom work. Perhaps we can best see the role of education if we analyze a specific current problem, find the bottlenecks to its solution and indicate how education can eliminate them. The housing problem will do as an example of such a current problem.

The housing situation in this, the richest country in the world, is a disgrace to the nation. Our failure to take effective steps to secure housing for veterans is a strange way to reward those who risked their lives for the preservation of our freedom. And the distressing housing conditions in our large cities produce crime and delinquency faster than our educational efforts can prevent these evils. Perhaps the most ironic of all the concomitants of the housing debacle is the fact that the problem remains unsolved for the simple reason that all effective proposed solutions have been defeated on the grounds that they were socialistic. Yet the present housing situation is making more communists than any propaganda agency could produce, even though it had millions for its work.

Now what *are* the bottlenecks? To begin with, the housing problem cannot be solved by private enterprise alone. Housing for low-income groups will not pro-

duce a profit at present costs. The problem cannot be solved entirely at the local or state levels. A more vigorous participation is required on the part of the federal government. But there are other difficulties. Union labor restrictions hamper rapid and low-cost construction. Contractors' practices and building codes in our cities are serious obstacles. The whole construction industry is archaic in organization. Notice the points at which education can help.

We must educate for a broader understanding of America's housing difficulties. Emphasis should be placed on the long-standing nature of the problem and on long-time solutions. We must dramatize the relationships of housing to the national well-being.

Education must help people to understand the proper role of the federal government. In America, the federal government is *our* government, just as truly as local and state government. A reading of the newspapers would certainly lead a stranger in our country to think that the federal government is an enemy of the people, remote and bent upon the oppression of the masses. Education cannot escape responsibility for the attitudes our people have toward the several branches and levels of government. Much of the present discussion of states rights is juvenile and based upon a fallacious reading of our history.

Education must make clear that expenditures for the public welfare are not undemocratic or fraught with danger of loss of freedom. We have spent billions on education, on public works, and on national parks without loss of any of our freedoms. We can spend billions on

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her husband as though he were a father and treats her children as playthings.

"We didn't help when Johnny began to be ashamed of his clothes and of not having lunch money, or money for model planes and candy bars. We didn't help him see that lack of money is not a shameful thing, or, more important, we didn't help him understand that he was not a shameful person because he lacked money. He left school to go to work as soon as the law would allow. I'm sure that further education would have helped him make a greater contribution to society.

"Milly learned in adolescence to be shamed of herself because she was a wall-flower and none of the boys asked her for dates. Rachel learned to be ashamed because of her family and her religion. John learned to be ashamed because of the color of his skin. Peter learned to be



Milly

ashamed because of his speech impediment. And we didn't help. We were too busy being afraid of youngsters, or of college entrance boards, or something else so much less important than the lives of boys and girls.

"So you see, Mary Jane, I'm afraid of being afraid of the wrong things. I'm afraid of not being *enough* afraid when important things are at stake. I'm afraid of such things as the wrong kind of shame, or misplaced feelings of guilt, or blind prejudice. I'm afraid of not giving help when help is needed. I hope you'll understand."

"Thank you, Aunt Alice," said Mary Jane. Her face was very solemn, but her eyes had lost that blind, scared look. "Thank you very much. You didn't tell me what I thought you would. I thought you might give me some tricks of 'discipline' so the kids would be sure to behave. I thought that was what I needed, but it wasn't. You are a fine teacher, Aunt Alice. Now I'm not afraid of children, I'm afraid for them, and I hope I'll always be afraid!"

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housing and not only retain our freedoms but make them more meaningful.

Education must help people to see that labor, and especially labor leaders, have responsibilities to the rest of society. Labor has a right to work for higher wages and better working conditions. But if labor manages and conducts its battle for its own interests in such a way as to injure the rest of the population, labor is failing to live up to its responsibilities.

Education must analyze the problems of capitalism and private enterprise. The private enterprise system is on trial. It cannot live unless it exercises greater social responsibility. In our highly concentrated society, capital has increased responsibilities, greater even than those of labor, because of the power of our large industrial organizations.

Most important of all, education must have a constant overtone of concern for the welfare of all men. We are our

brother's keepers. Every child should grow up in a school, home, and community atmosphere of social responsibility and social sensitivity. Cooperation rather than competition should be the spirit of education. But social responsibility, sensitivity, and cooperation can be taught best through action, through the daily processes of living. Failure to translate values into action makes them meaningless.

Other examples could be given, but perhaps these will suffice to indicate education's responsibility and the nature of the vigorous program in which we must engage if we are to be instrumental in saving freedom. This program must include work with the children in our schools. It must provide a community-wide education of adults. It must mobilize the civic organizations of each community. It must energize and revitalize that individual and collective sense of social responsibility without which freedom cannot live.

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