

Conflict in the Minds of Men

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The Social Sciences Department of UNESCO, with headquarters in Paris, has under way a major research project entitled "Tensions Affecting International Understanding." Kathleen Kehoe of the staff describes several aspects of this study which is attempting to examine the social and psychological factors giving rise to tensions between individuals and nations.

UNESCO—the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization—deals with the most fundamental, the most dangerous, and the most creative of all things: the minds of men. The premise is set out clearly in the preamble to UNESCO's constitution "that since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed; . . . that a peace based exclusively upon the political and economic arrangements of governments would not be a peace which could secure the unanimous, lasting, and sincere support of the peoples of the world, and that the peace must therefore be founded, if it is not to fail, upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind." In all of its activities—in its program departments of Education, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, Mass Communications, to mention a few—UNESCO is aiming toward this goal of a peace based upon understanding among men.

The Tensions Project

Within the Social Sciences Department of UNESCO, there is a project called "Tensions Affecting International Understanding," which is concerned with conflict in the minds of

men. It includes some thirty items of investigation, and social scientists all over the world are collaborating in studying the social and psychological factors which give rise to tensions within people, between people, and between nations. There is not space here to discuss all of these items of research, interesting though they are. The half-dozen briefly described below have been chosen to give an idea of the work of the Tensions Project.

Ways of Life

Tensions between peoples arise largely from misunderstandings. Where misunderstanding is the result of differences of custom and habit, something can be done about it. The Tensions Project, in cooperation with the International Studies Conference, is preparing an international "bookshelf" to consist of a series of monographs by experts in sixteen countries on the "ways of life" of those countries—their institutions, community patterns, and their ideals and values. This series should be valuable for teachers and students, for statesmen, for international civil servants, and for travellers wanting something more than a tourist's-eye view. A large part of this bookshelf will be published in 1950.

Model Textbook

Misinformation or biased information is another danger to the minds of men, particularly the minds of school-age children who are just beginning to learn about the rest of the world. One method of dealing with this problem is to revise textbooks so that they present a fair picture of other countries. Another more positive method is to set up models which show how textbooks might be written in the first place, showing how every culture has borrowed from the cultures of other lands, and how interdependent all peoples really are. To this end, two leading French historians, Professor Febvre of the Collège de France and Professor Braudel of the Sorbonne, are preparing a model French history textbook. Such a textbook could be sent around to historians in other countries as an example of what can be done along these lines.

Prejudice

If a biased textbook is a threat to the child's understanding, a biased teacher is even more so. The Tensions Project is enabling the New Education Fellowship in London to carry on group research among teachers who are trying to find out about their own prejudices. This is, of course, a pioneer effort, but promises to grow into a substantial one through the interest and enthusiasm of the teachers themselves. As teachers in general become more interested in ferreting out and discussing their prejudices, the latter are less likely ever to reach the classroom.

In the United States, the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues is also doing research on prejudice,

and with UNESCO's help will be bringing out a volume on "The Measurement of Prejudice."

Education and Technology

Going beyond the immediate environment of the classroom, we come up against even broader educational problems. Most countries at present take no adequate measures to make certain that their educational system and their technological needs are in rapport. As a consequence, the educational system may be turning out disproportionately large numbers of white-collar workers and too few primary producers, or too many unskilled workers and too few technicians. A man educated (or miseducated) for a job that does not exist is a source of acute tension to himself, to his country, and to the world. Discontented intellectuals who see no openings for their talents, working upon unskilled workers with a sense of grievance, are one of the greatest unsettling elements both within countries and between countries.

For this reason, the Tensions Project is calling together experts from about sixteen countries to discuss this whole area of the relationship between educational systems and technological requirements. The experts will be asked to report on the situation in their own countries and to make recommendations as a group.

Community Studies

The preceding paragraphs have described efforts to deal with some of the sources of tensions. It may be appropriate now to show how social scientists actually go about investigating tensions in their natural habitat—the minds of

men. At present, French, Indian, Australian, and Swedish field-workers are studying communities in their respective countries. These studies will have the advantage of comparability, for the field-workers were trained together in modern social science techniques and are using essentially the same work-plan. The following extract from the working guide prepared for them outlines one possible avenue of investigation:

A number of hypotheses have been suggested regarding the relationship between the patterns of family organization, in the broadest sense, and certain aspects of personality development. It has been suggested, for example, that what is important in the development of the very young child is not the specific method of feeding, toilet training, etc., but the interpersonal relationships between parents and children. More particularly, the important factors, according to this hypothesis, are (a) respect for the child versus threats or indifference; (b) the degree of tenderness toward children; (c) the security of the child based on his feeling that he is loved unconditionally; and (d) the amount of stimulation a child receives for the development of his own powers according to his individuality and age level.

Related to the above are the following specific hypotheses:

'Unaffectional' relations produce individuals who are aggressive inside and outside their groups

'Affectional' relations produce individuals who are loyal toward their group and friendly in their relations to out-groups.

Expressed somewhat differently, but also related to the above, is the suggestion that:

Just as "charity begins at home," so tensions begin at home. Tensions against members of other nations are the results of hostility produced within one's own society (and presumably originally within one's own family) which, under certain conditions, is transferred to other nations.

We have here the whole problem of authoritarian upbringing as an explanation of the development of certain constellations of character traits in later life.

Attitudes Toward Foreigners

Individual specialists in various countries are now engaged in testing and interviewing children and young people to find out what they think about foreigners. To take one instance, H. E. O. James of the British Institute of Education has been collecting material on the stereotyped notions of English school children concerning Germans, Italians, Americans, Chinese, and other nationality groups. By means of informal interviews where the children were allowed to speak freely and unselfconsciously, he discovered some of the effects on their minds of the war years, of films, of what the adults around them were thinking.

He found in particular from these interviews that when children were confronted by a living person, the impression made by that contact wiped out earlier impressions. For example, children who actually had had some favorable personal contact with German prisoners of war, no longer thought of the typical German as a bomb-dropper or eater of little girls. The interviewed children in many cases revealed a definite change-over. Dr. James now plans to take a group of school children,

examine their ideas about another nationality or race, then get them a teacher from that foreign country or race. He plans to interview the class during and after this experience to find out if, when, and how the children's notions changed.

Application of Findings

If it can be shown scientifically that children's stereotypes concerning foreigners can be corrected by face-to-face contact, this may have implications for other aspects of UNESCO's work, and for education in general. It must be remembered, of course, that such a study is only one item of the entire program within a division of the Social Sciences Department. But one item can have repercussions right through the nerve-system of the organization, affecting perhaps Fundamental Education on the one hand and Mass Communications on the other. The process is not automatic. But an international organization is in a position to bring together the various lines of research into a meaningful pattern, making its findings available on a wide scale.

Some may criticize inquiries such as these as being too academic and esoteric. As an example of practical application, the Tensions Project has been asked by the Government of India to send a social science consultant to India to advise and assist Indian universities in studying the vast and complicated area of social tensions to which that country has fallen heir. Professor Gardner Murphy of the City College of New York will go there for six months on behalf of UNESCO to train field-workers and to help organize the re-

search. This is certainly practical and applied social science.

Faith and Understanding

There is a query which the skeptic might put to the social scientist engaged in research on social tensions. He might say that however much we learn about attitudes, and however adroit we become in using our social science techniques, we do not really know what attitudes are the most desirable, the most conducive to "the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind." Brotherly love does not work on Hitlers, nor does understanding them make us like them any better. The minds of men being what they are—unpredictable and paradoxical—tolerance can turn into irresponsibility; and on the other hand, a sense of duty can become dangerous fanaticism. Therefore, how are we going to avoid wars and self-destruction? Other societies have perished after thousands of years of civilized life, even without benefit of the atomic bomb.

To this there is a reply. It is indeed quite possible that our society may eventually die a pointless death after an equally pointless life. To sit back and regard this as inevitable is to bring it about. A living community must be founded on a faith in the ultimate goodness of man, and in a purposeful creativity underlying his existence. It is upon this faith that the work of the Tensions Project is based. But faith, by itself, is not enough. To be effective it needs to be seconded by understanding. It is this understanding, in the fullest sense of the word, that the Tensions Project seeks to promote.

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