

*Responsibility for world freedom
rests in our hands.*

Social Understanding for Survival

OUR Republic has entered the most awesome period of its history. As never before, it is being challenged to its very foundations. Certainly in its sweep this challenge surpasses anything we have experienced in the past. That the Republic will survive is by no means certain. Indeed, that the human race itself will survive is a question for the gods. An education that fails to respond boldly and imaginatively to this situation will betray the faith of the founders of our system of public schools.

We are living, to use Toynbee's phrase, in a "time of troubles." And this "time of troubles" is to be distinguished from its many predecessors in the long history of the race by the fact that all mankind, and not just one people or one civilization or one continent, is involved. It is an age of revolution as wide as the planet. It is an age in which the very structure of the world is being transformed. It is an age in which the impossible follows swiftly on the heels of the impossible. As Anne O'Hare McCormick wrote in the *New York Times* in the autumn of 1938, following the signing of the Munich Pact, which was to bring "peace in our time," it is an age in

which "all of those things are happening in the world which could not happen."

Mrs. McCormick knew, of course, that things don't happen that can't happen. She was merely employing a literary figure to dramatize the fact that so many things are happening that could not happen if our premises about the world were sound. In other words we continue to think from premises derived from a world that is passing or has passed away. I need only to mention the First World War, the retreat of democracy, the triumph of totalitarian doctrines and movements, the great depression, the disaster at Pearl Harbor, the Second World War, the incredibly swift rise of Russia, the conquest of the atom, the penetration of outer space, and the triumph of Communism in China. Many are beginning to think that the "modern age" closed in 1914.

The moving force in the great and fateful drama which is being played in this age is science and the application of science to the ways of life-technology.

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We have by no means learned as yet how to discipline this force and make the necessary adjustments in our institutions, our outlook on the world, and our system of values. Indeed, we have scarcely been aware of the need to do so. In fact we have thoughtlessly concentrated our energies and talents on pushing forward ever more swiftly the frontiers of scientific and technical knowledge, discovery and invention. All of this we have called "progress." We should be pondering the wise words of Stanley Casson, a distinguished English archaeologist, who in 1937 published a book in which he traced the theme of "progress and catastrophe" as far back as the human record could take him. "Whenever," he concluded, "his practical inventiveness ran ahead of his moral consciousness and his social organization, then man has equally faced destruction. Perhaps today we are in this stage."

Certainly, Western man's "practical inventiveness" has rendered obsolete both his operating "moral consciousness" and his "social organization." May it not be that the supreme task of our total program of education is to close this gap—and to close it in the shortest possible period of time? Otherwise, the gap will grow wider with every passing year. As R. J. Forbes, a student of the history of engineering, observed after the harnessing of atomic energy, "we have picked up but a few pebbles on the shores of a vast ocean that remains to be explored."

Realities

Now let us list briefly a few of the great and inescapable realities which confront us in this age. Perhaps the greatest of them all is the fact that the

earth has become a "little neighborhood" and is growing smaller by the hour. This means that the great cycle which opened in the Garden of Eden is closing in our time.

How large this legendary "garden" was where man first appeared on the planet and ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil we do not know. But in all likelihood it was in many respects larger than the entire earth is today. And so we are back at the beginning of the human adventure, but with a difference. All of the races and peoples and nations, all of the languages and cultures and social systems, with their accumulated fears, hatreds, ignorances, and prejudices formed during the long migration from the place of origin, are crowded together now in this tiny earthly neighborhood. Whether they can learn to live together in peace, sympathy and understanding is the supreme question facing mankind in this age.

The closing of this major cycle in human history has a very special meaning for America. When Alexis de Tocqueville, the brilliant young French aristocrat, arrived in the United States in the spring of 1831, he was basically hostile toward the democratic idea. Within a few months, however, he changed his mind and set down in his notes "ten causes" for the success of our institutions. The second of these causes was: "Their geographical position. No neighbors."

Unquestionably the development of our free institutions was greatly facilitated by the presence of the great oceans which served as powerful bulwarks provided by nature. Today these oceans are gone. Consequently every political, economic, military or ideological storm that rises anywhere on the earth quickly reaches our shores. And what

we do affects the condition and prospect of mankind everywhere.

The second great reality of this age is linked with the first. A minor cycle embracing approximately five hundred years is also closing in these days. In the middle of the fifteenth century the light-skinned peoples of Europe seemed on the verge of being enslaved or driven into the sea. The Tartars still exacted tribute from Russian princes, the Moors were still entrenched in the Iberian peninsula, and the Ottoman Turks were striking boldly and successfully at the southeastern gates of Europe. Then, owing to a number of factors, including certainly the invention of new weapons of warfare and the advance of nautical science, the tables were turned. The people of Europe went on the offensive and moved out in all directions from their cramped quarters. By the end of the nineteenth century they held nine-tenths of the land surface of the globe, dominated the remainder, and ruled the "seven seas." As a result of their fabulous successes, they developed a sense of unqualified superiority and assumed that they were destined by their own nature to govern the world.

Today the colonial empires founded in the epoch of European ascendancy are in process of disintegration and the colored peoples are rising everywhere. That they will be satisfied with anything less than equality of status among the nations is altogether improbable. And it must be realized that they constitute two-thirds of the human race. In this situation our treatment of the Negro assumes a fateful urgency. This is no longer a purely domestic question. It weakens the "Voice of America" from Tokyo to New Delhi, to Cairo, to Stanleyville, to

Rio. It may cause us to lose the great struggle for freedom in the world.

The closing of these two cycles has been attended by a fabulous increase in the power reposing in the hands of mankind, which opens unlimited vistas of good and evil. There is, first of all, power over the forces of nature. In the technically advanced countries human muscle provides but the tiniest fraction of the energy employed in the production of goods and services and the maintenance of systems of communication and transportation. An economy of material abundance is now within the grasp of all mankind. There is, secondly, power over human life and death. Most of the dread diseases of the past have been banished in the technically advanced countries, the birth rate can now be controlled, and the lifespan is beyond the dreams of earlier ages and is increasing every year.

Man also possesses the means for destroying himself utterly and bringing to a close his entire adventure on the earth. At the same time, human fertility, if unregulated, may cause a political explosion as devastating as the atomic bomb.

There is finally power over the human mind. Through the new weapons of warfare, the swift means of transportation, and the fantastic media of mass communication, combined with advances in the psychological sciences, a tiny minority is now able to enslave whole nations and shape the minds of millions according to the desired pattern. It is this development that distinguishes contemporary totalitarianism from the despotisms of the past. And in the biological sciences we seem to be on the verge of discoveries which will enable us to create life and shape the nature of man according to our desires.

Although the earthly neighborhood is

small when measured in terms of speed of communication, it is vast indeed when viewed from the standpoint of human understanding. In fact, to many a thoughtful mind it appears that man has created a system of national and world relationships so complex in its patterns, so wide in its sweep, and so dynamic in its tendencies that it may be beyond the control of its creator. The period through which we have lived has demonstrated again and again that events occurring on the other side of the planet, in places which only yesterday were far away, may affect the destinies of our Republic more profoundly than anything happening within our own borders. As one famous commentator has said, there are no longer local elections anywhere in the world. In fact the most important election for us taking place in a given year may occur on the other side of the oceans. And when we think we have arrived at understanding, we may be confronted suddenly with a new configuration of events and forces.

With its vast energies and interdependent relationships this little earthly neighborhood is deeply divided. It is in fact a battleground of seemingly irreconcilable contending forces which at the climax represent Democracy and Communism, freedom and despotism. Konstantin Simonov, a leading Russian dramatist, put the case a few years ago in these words: "A most ferocious struggle between two systems, between two world outlooks, between two conceptions of the future of mankind has been, is being, and will be waged in the world." And the progress of the struggle was extravagantly outlined as follows about two years ago by a leading Soviet educator: "The mighty ideas born of the great October revolution are winning trium-

phantly the minds and the hearts of millions of people throughout the world. Marching with the one billion population of the socialist camp are seven hundred millions living in countries which have recently achieved independence and five hundred millions struggling for independence. There remain in the camp of imperialism only four hundred million people. As Mao Tse-Tung has picturesquely said: 'It is no longer the west wind that directs the east wind, but the east wind that directs the west wind.'

Because of our great power the leadership of the free peoples in this struggle rests ineluctably on our shoulders and the cause of freedom on the earth reposes in large measure in our hands. That the struggle will stop short of trial by atomic weapons seems probable. But this merely means that we are challenged to engage in a kind of struggle that has always been difficult for a democratic state: we are called upon to sustain a position requiring sacrifice, *based on understanding* for an indefinite and in all likelihood a long period of time.

Here is the challenge of these times to America in the broad field of education. The time has long since passed into history when we could be satisfied with the pursuit of money, material comforts, and social position. The survival of human freedom, if not of human life on the planet, is at stake.

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