

## ● Where Should Education Go?

### A SEARCH FOR DIRECTION

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EDUCATION is one of the most frequently discussed themes in today's world and there is no subject on which we have such a varied and generous expression of opinion or on which so many persons regard themselves as competent, if not authoritative, observers. This is partly so, because it touches everyone—man, woman, or child, the literate as well as the illiterate, the cultured as well as the uncultured, the man who is interested in the world of the mind as well as the man concerned with the world of technology.

Democracy, which many of us cherish as an ideal, however imperfectly, is another factor in the situation which reinforces the interest of the people in the whole process of education—the formulation of its objectives and purposes, the working out of its methods and techniques, the designing of its structure, and the general climate of its work. This is all to the good, provided we, whose business it is to think and reflect and judge and define the direction of educational policy, do not hand over our final responsibility to the pressure of mass opinion.

As I look at the world horizon today, I feel that there is considerable danger of this being done in many countries. Education is being influenced, in fact dominated, by political considerations to an undesirable extent and all kinds of irrelevant considerations are being imported into it, for reasons which have nothing to do either with the formation of student personality or with giving it the necessary social and cultural orientation. This is happening not only, say, in Communist China where the students' Red Guard have reduced educational ideals and goals to a pitiable mockery but also in many so-called democratic countries, old and new. I am not referring to manifestations of students' understandable interest in problems like the Vietnam war or the color conflict in America, which are great public issues and naturally appeal, as they should, to the indignant and idealistic impulses of youth. I am thinking of what is happening in many African, Asian, European, and Latin American countries also where we find students indulging in antisocial acts and practices which are not merely uncon-

nected with, but repugnant to, the spirit of their academic endeavor.

## Issues in Change

Teachers, professors, educational "authorities" have usually failed to play their proper part in this growing crisis. In fact, they are bewildered and do not know what their role is. They are often swayed by the "winds of change"—either swaying with them, because it is easy, or standing against them because they think it is their duty to do so. And, it is a matter of regret that policy is often not thought out intelligently and with a proper analysis of its long-range and short-range implications. The search for proper direction, therefore, becomes, in some ways, the most crucial educational issue of the age. It is obviously not possible for me to define the "right" direction, because, among other things, the socioeconomic and political-cultural situations differ so markedly in the various countries of the world that no particular direction can possibly be mapped out which will meet all of them. But one can indicate some of the factors which will have to be taken into account in making this attempt in any country.

### Between Generations

In many countries, it seems to me, real conversation between the generations has broken down. They neither speak the same language, nor use the same idiom—literally and metaphorically—nor have the same background of cultural values or assumptions. All this is well-known and scholars have written learnedly about the conflict between the generations which I do not need to repeat. I am, however, deeply concerned about the fact that, in this

tragic situation, parents and teachers have often laid down their arms and surrendered their educational responsibility. Many of them are either unable or unwilling to face the issue or they feel apologetic about their own intellectual, social, and moral position. Insofar as this is due to a genuine realization of their moral inadequacy, I have nothing to say. But more often it is a pusillanimous acceptance of the aberrations of youth, their defiance of legal and moral laws, their disregard of reasonable social limitations on individual actions.

We have no justification for thinking that all the thought, culture, philosophy, and social, moral, and religious principles and laws which mankind has built up over thousands of years, with spiritual agony and travail, have suddenly become defunct or outdated in the latter half of the 20th century, or that the half-baked youth of today have the right not only to sit in judgment on them—which they certainly have in a sense—but also to reject them uncritically. It is one thing to exercise *responsible* judgment, to distinguish between what is of value in the contemporary situation and what may have ceased to be of value, and quite another to rate their juvenile and crude experiments in thinking above the cumulative thought of the generations. I realize well enough that the cultivation of the capacity to think is the educator's most precious responsibility—in schools as well as the universities—and I am not belittling it. But it must be built up on the basis of a careful, sensitive study of what great men and women have thought and expressed through the ages and youth must be taught to cultivate not only the spirit of objectivity but also the patience,

tolerance, and restraint necessary for not jumping to hasty, ill-informed conclusions.

### **Growing Technology**

Another direction in which educators should explore their way is in defining their attitude to technology and its relation to what may broadly be called "humanism." In the advanced and affluent nations of the West, in particular, technology has won its greatest triumphs as well as created its worst headaches. Education is largely dominated by the same passion for technology which dominates national life as a whole, and the ever-increasing production of goods—with obsolescence built into them for the sake of profit making—is becoming the noble and often exclusive goal of human effort. This is put with some exaggeration but it is basically true.

Yet an obsession with the "Thing" (as Tagore called it) has a way of taking its revenge. It dulls or kills the activity of the spirit and makes man irresponsible to its higher urges. Such an obsession does more—it plants into life's beautiful garden many poisonous weeds: unbridled competition, exploitation of the weak, political and social injustice, and neglect of social services and civic amenities. It creates new headaches which are not cured either by affluence or even by better distribution of wealth—social irresponsibility, divorce, drunkenness, suicide, hold-ups, brutal murders "just for the heck of it," and what not. If we go into these social tragedies carefully we will find that they are due to a large variety of causes, but among them priority must be given to the fact that there is often a vacuity

or purposelessness or lack of proper adjustment in the lives of the people who indulge in them. As a distinguished Dutch educationist, Rosencranz, said to me once: "We have given our youth much to live *by* but not much to live *for*." They may be actually working and making a profitable living—but it is often work which does not interest them, does not offer any scope for self-expression, does not fully absorb their capacities. Or, they may be deprived of full-time, consistent, meaningful working opportunities, as also happens in technologically advanced countries. In either case, when life has no significant purpose besides earning a living, when the insensitive, self-centered ego, hard as a billiard ball, fails to become absorbed as part of some great and growing social and intellectual movements, its promise is likely to be blighted.

Many great eastern and western thinkers in the past and even today—perhaps more in the East than in the West—hold the belief that life is something more than the accumulation of riches and buying increasingly unnecessary goods on the installment plan; that keeping up with the Joneses is not the highest good in life; that there are values in a life of austerity which we will do well to explore; that a slight taste of what life means to the desperately poor or underprivileged sections of the world community will be good for our education and for awakening our social conscience; that what Buddha and Jesus and Muhammad and Gandhi and Tolstoy and many others have taught and practiced in different ages has a certain wisdom of its own which we dare not ignore.

Perhaps in this respect even what

some of the so-called "hippies" and others of their school of thought are doing—by reverting to simpler ways of life—may prove to be of some value, in spite of the crudities that are mixed up with it. It may, who knows, shake the confidence of the snobbish, self-confident, sometimes vacant-minded, and empty-hearted men of wealth and power who naively believe that they have discovered the ultimate secret of the good life and all that the rest of the world need do is to follow their excellent example as successful money makers—except that they will do all they can to ensure that the rest of the world does not actually do so and become a threat to their usurped privileges! So one of the new directions that education must explore is how this generation, and the generations to come, can strike a balance between the undoubted advantages that technology has brought to man and the other great humane values, which are neither basically antagonistic nor identical with the values of technology. This will be an attempt to discover how man can control and direct technology so as to make it an effective and civilized means of achieving his worthy purposes, instead of letting it become a relentless master of his life and activities.

### **War and Peace**

Above all, modern education must define its attitude to the basic problem of the age—the issue of war and peace. Things have come to such a critical pass and mankind's future is so precariously balanced that it cannot be left to the hands of those who formulate war policies and programs. These have, however, become so complex, so technologi-

cal, so difficult for the common man to understand, involving such orders of expenditure and such enormities of terror and torture and such possibilities of nuclear annihilation, that he is content to leave them to experts. But this is precisely the reason why it has become the business of *all* men and women of good will to concern themselves with what is happening.

I do not really know what educationists, teachers, and students—and those who formulate educational policies and administer the programs—can do to meet this challenge. Conditions will differ from country to country, depending on its political set-up and the amount of pressure that intellectuals and public opinion, in general, can exercise. But, the more discouraging the situation, the greater is the call on the courage and the conscience of those who can think and offer right guidance. As I said, one cannot lay down any particular course of action for all teachers and students. But I *do* believe that it is their function to cultivate, from the outset, a climate of peace and a mind devoted to peace in all educational institutions, remembering that wars, like volcanoes, do not erupt suddenly but are slowly built up on the ugly foundations of fears, phobias, complexes, hatred, deprivations, injustices, and social insensitivity. It is also their business to build in the minds of youth a healthy resistance to propaganda, which is being constantly poured over them from all the media of mass communication, like the dangerous "fall-out" from nuclear devices. It poisons their mind as surely as the "fallout" poisons our water and food resources, our health and the atmosphere in which we breathe. It must cultivate in them

an appreciation of values that are humane and civilized and a deep dedication to them. And if a moral and spiritual crisis develops which threatens man's future—as is the case at present—some of them at least should have the courage to stand out for what they consider to be right, irrespective of how men in power and authority may react to it. This will perhaps apply more to teachers and intellectual leaders than to the students, many of whom may not be mature enough to come to independent decisions on such matters of moment.

I have spoken of the "search for direction" in education not in strictly educational terms but in the wider terms of the social situation in which education finds itself. The educator's specific task is, of course, to translate these wider purposes and his new sense of direction into curricular terms, which cover both the contents and methods of education as well as many other related factors. I am, however, convinced that no mere curricular change will bring

about the kind of ideological revolution that is needed—just as no mere theoretical formulation of purposes and directions will bring it about, unless it is accompanied by the necessary adjustments and repatterning of the system and the day-to-day working of the classrooms, and the lecture halls, and the many ancillary activities which make up the pulsating life of an educational institution. And let us always remember that the task of an educator is not merely the transmission of culture and skills. This is an important part of his work, but it represents a timid view of his total function. This total function includes the reconstruction, reorientation, and repatterning of this culture, accepting from it what is good and life-giving and renews its ever-new promise, eschewing whatever arrests the healthy flow of life's sap in the new generation.

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