

Political Socialization in International Perspective

BYRON G. MASSIALAS **

Interview *

Q.: Do you think the United States can trust other countries?

A.: It depends on what countries they are. Some countries, yes. The Soviet Union, no. I mean, some countries you can. Some countries like the Soviet Union could invade us right now. I mean they're a country you can't trust. Some countries, yes, you can really trust them.

Q.: What countries can you trust?

A.: Oh ah, Australia, that's one you can trust. We go there all the time. That's one you can trust. Right now, this year and that, Vietnam. Ah, Denmark, Sweden, Ireland, ones like that.

Q.: What are some other ones? You said you couldn't trust the Soviet Union. What are some other ones that you couldn't trust?

A.: Yugoslavia, ah Germany, ah let me see, one half of Vietnam.

Q.: What about the Soviet Union, why can't we trust them?

A.: We can't trust them at all. I mean, they're just a state, I mean a country, that likes to have war. We think that they just love war; if they had freedom they would probably die. It's just that their custom is war all the time.

* Excerpt from an interview with a sixth-grade girl from a rural school in Michigan, recorded by Sue Bailey and Allen Glenn.

ONE way in which the schools relate to the political system is through the political socialization of children and youth.¹ The schools—the curriculum, the textbooks, the instructional methods, the school clubs, the classroom milieu, the students, the teachers, the administrative structure, and the like—may implicitly or explicitly engage in the transmission of basic political orientations toward the environment. These orientations can be (a) cognitive (for example, ability to analyze and interpret data about political institutions or behavior), (b) affective (for example, the development of positive or negative attitudes toward the symbols of authority), or (c) evaluative (for example, judgments based on application of certain standards to the performance of political roles). The kinds of political orientations children develop determine to a large extent the type of political culture that will prevail. Basic political orientations are formed very early in life, especially between the ages of 3 and 13, and unless a very powerful environment impinges upon the individual, he tends to remain with the same orientations throughout his life cycle.

Cultures in which there is a relatively high degree of citizen involvement (civic cultures) generally have people who view

¹ For a detailed discussion of the role of education in political socialization, see: Byron G. Massialas. *Education and the Political System*. Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1969. 219 pp.

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themselves as politically efficacious. That is, they feel that they can, through their own efforts, influence political decision making. Nations in which the people have very little concern for changing the government through their own efforts have parochial political cultures. In these nations the citizen expects virtually nothing from the political system.

In order for a political system to survive it must secure reasonable support from its citizens. Support for (or criticism of) the system is provided by various socialization agents, for example, the family, the church, the peer group, the school. For instance, the schools may socialize children to accept, without question, the policies of the government and develop benign attitudes toward the authorities.

Conversely, the schools may impart critical orientations toward the regime. By stressing the rights and privileges of citizens (rather than their duties and obligations), schools may stimulate youth to organize and articulate certain wants to the government in the form of demands. Sometimes, as in several recent cases of student activism, these demands are directed against the administration of the school which represents the symbol of political authority of the larger community.

In many countries, for example, Turkey under Adnan Menderes and South Korea under Syngman Rhee, the respective governments have been toppled through student-initiated action. Elsewhere, students expressed through their actions, both spontaneous and organized, varying degrees of concern and interest in the affairs of their government.

International Political Socialization

International political socialization has two general meanings. First, the term refers to the process of transmitting knowledge about and attitudes toward the international community of men. American children, for example, learn about and develop certain attitudes toward other political systems, either national, regional, or worldwide. Second, the term refers to the process of trans-

mission of political orientations in different national settings. Questions asked in this context are: Are German children as strongly influenced in developing politically relevant behavior by educational institutions as are English children? Are Italian children as cynical toward certain aspects of political life as American children? Let us look at some relevant findings from comparative studies.

Political Efficacy

Political efficacy is only one outcome of political socialization. The expression usually refers to the image that one has of himself as a person who can influence the decision-making process of the government. This image stems in part from the person's ability to understand the operation of his government and feel competent in changing it. As mentioned before, the level of political efficacy of a nation's citizens provides a good indication of the nation's political culture—parochial, subject, civic, or mixed.

A cross-cultural study of five nations indicated that Americans and British are the most efficacious, followed by Germans, Mexicans, and Italians.² In all countries, perception of ability to influence the government, both on the national and local levels, varied with the amount of education a person had—the more education the higher the expectations for active citizenship. Age, sex, social class, intelligence, personality, ethnicity, and religion are also important factors in understanding patterns of political efficacy of children in different nations.

In the five-nation study already mentioned, it was found that when the individual is given the opportunity to participate in school decisions (either by protesting against an unfair regulation or by taking an active part in classroom discussion) his political efficacy is increased. That is, those who remembered participating in school decisions had higher scores on the index of political efficacy than those who did not.

The effects of manifest teaching of poli-

² Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba. *The Civic Culture*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963.

tics or civics on the political socialization of children and youth are not clear. Formal courses in these areas (politics, civics, national history) seem to make no appreciable difference in political efficacy, cynicism (or its opposite, social trust), expectations for political participation, sense of civic duty, and the like. Even political knowledge does not seem to be increased by exposure to traditional school civics or history programs.

Concept of Other Nations

What kinds of cognitive understanding about and affective orientations toward other peoples do children develop? In what way does the school contribute to the development of these orientations?

Among youth in Western Europe there is a strong movement away from strictly nationalistic orientations to identification with larger systems (for example, an integrated Europe).³ In 1964-65 the overall percentage of youth, ages 13-19, who were for European unification was as follows: In the Netherlands, 95 percent; Germany, 95 percent; Britain, 72 percent. A poll of adults in these countries taken earlier indicated a strong feeling for unification but not as strong as that of youth. The age group of 55 and over is markedly less European than all others. The differences between adults and youth are due to the early socialization patterns in the different age groups. While the research suggests that the prospects for a "United States of Europe" are good, it does not attribute to any particular agent any significant influence on this development.

A study of children's attitudes toward foreign peoples in 14 countries revealed that Bantu and Brazilian 14-year-old children were the most ethnocentric.⁴ The American, Canadian, Japanese, and French children were the least. Lebanese, Turkish, Israeli, and German children formed an "in-between" group

in terms of ethnocentrism. When asked to name other peoples who were similar to them, all groups with the exception of Bantu children considered Americans to be "like us." (Americans were within the first three choices.) The British and the French were also considered by several of the national groups to be "like us." The Chinese and Africans were most consistently considered "not like us."

As children grew older they increasingly considered the Russians "not like us." The characterizations given to the various reference groups are also revealing. In general, the Israelis were thought of as good, religious, peaceful, intelligent; the Japanese as poor, intelligent, bad; the Turkish as good, peaceful, ambitious, religious, patriotic, clean.

It is extremely difficult to interpret these and other results concerning the development of stereotypes in children. Some of the factors are embedded in the national background of the children, the cultural values under which they are brought up, demographic factors such as age, sex, and social status, and the impact of the various socialization agents. It is interesting, however, to note that the majority of the six-year-olds receive their information about foreign peoples from parents, television and movies, and direct contact. The older children, ages 10 to 14, identify major sources of information as being television and movies, books, school course work, textbooks, and magazines. Parents, teachers, and friends are not mentioned often as sources of information among the older age group.

Although it is extremely difficult to trace the origins of ethnocentrism to any of the sources of information that young children point to (there are so many other mediating factors involved), it is revealing to see how other cultures are treated in formal school work. Studies are not plentiful in this area, but the ones we have (mostly studies of textbooks) indicate that standard texts tend to perpetuate misconceptions and national stereotypes and are ethnocentric in their treatment of other cultures. American civics and history texts, for example, present the United States as the champion of freedom,

³ Ronald Inglehart. "An End to European Integration?" *The American Political Science Review* 61(1): 91-105; March 1967.

⁴ Wallace E. Lambert and Otto Klineberg. *Children's Views of Foreign Peoples*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1967.

goodwill, and rationality, while other sovereign states are either aggressors or second-raters.

Traditional elementary and secondary school textbooks (most of which describe and praise or condemn rather than critically analyze political institutions and actors) provide the worst means to introduce students to an understanding of government and the role of the citizen in decision making.⁵ Authors and publishers of texts, not only in the United States but abroad, tend to underestimate the ability of young people to order their own learning experiences and to develop plausible explanations of political and social phenomena.

Implications

One of the most important indices of political socialization is the sense of efficacy that an individual has to understand and influence the decisions of his government. Styles of political efficacy relate to types of political systems existing in the world. High levels of efficacy usually characterize democratic polities. Formal education potentially relates to political efficacy. The influence of elementary education seems to be more direct than that of secondary education.

When sociopolitical issues are discussed in the classroom in a true spirit of inquiry, then the level of political efficacy of the

participants may be raised. This hypothesis needs to be tested carefully in different national settings. Research indicates, however, that very few teachers deal explicitly with issues and even fewer with the methods of disciplined inquiry in discussing these issues.

The research on the political socialization patterns of children in different countries suggests that while there is a general movement toward identifying and accepting larger political arrangements (for example, the concept of a United Europe), basic parochial and ethnocentric tendencies in both cognitive and affective orientations toward the world still prevail among children. In many instances, schools (through courses, textbooks, instructional methods, and the like) tend to reinforce and perpetuate distorted images of other peoples of the world or of ethnic minorities within a country.

The most significant implications for the classroom teacher have already been outlined. In order to maximize political efficacy and minimize ethnocentrism, teachers need to attend directly to current political and social issues, introduce them systematically into the formal program of the school, and discuss them through the mode of inquiry which emphasizes alternatives advanced by the participants and which asks for the defensibility of value positions. The total school milieu should be supportive of this effort. When students develop participatory rather than compliant or apathetic behavior and when they evolve cosmopolitan rather than parochial outlooks of other people, the school as an agent of political socialization will have a share in an emerging world culture. □

⁵ Byron G. Massialas. "Citizenship and Political Socialization." In: *Encyclopedia of Educational Research*. Robert L. Ebel, editor. Fourth Edition. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1969. pp. 124-41.

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