

## Students Call for Nuclear Age Education

**Educators and students attending a recent conference agreed that schools are not preparing students for the nuclear age.**

FRED ROSE

In January of this year, educators met for the first time to discuss the future of nuclear age education. The national gathering, entitled "Instituting Nuclear Age Education: Toward a Cooperative Future," was convened at Emory University in Atlanta by International Student Pugwash (ISP). Participants in the symposium represented the diversity of this burgeoning field. They came from high schools, colleges, and educational and professional associations; from the sciences, social sciences, and humanities. These innovators were united by the conviction that education about nuclear weapons and arms control is essential to the future their students will face.

A primary purpose of the meeting was to elaborate strategies for improving and managing the many nuclear education efforts now under way. Growth in the field has been rapid but haphazard, occurring largely through isolated initiatives. Clearly, a process for exchanging information and resources within the nuclear education community must be created. And just as clearly, a forum must be established to explore the persistent questions, both philosophical and pedagogical, that underlie the various nuclear education programs.

Sessions at the meeting explored the purpose, content, and development of nuclear education. Through these discussions, it became clear that basic improvements are necessary both in the methods of teaching critical nuclear issues and in the material being taught.

The challenge to the education community was further clarified by a discussion of existing institutional and individual barriers to developing nuclear education. Psychologically, the nuclear issue is complex and threatening to students, parents, teachers, and administrators. Moreover, many people see it as a partisan issue and not a matter of general education. The complexity and interdisciplinary nature of the subject matter make it difficult to fit into existing programs. And finally, the long silence about nuclear issues has resulted in a scarcity of material and teacher preparation.

### The Separation of Knowledge and Values

Two points of general agreement emerged from the symposium: (1) education has failed to adequately prepare students to face the nuclear age; and (2) the problem of nuclear weapons can be solved only through a much broader understanding of the reasons for their existence in the first place.

Fundamental disagreement arose, however, about both the nature of the schools' failure and the causes of the arms race. Has education failed to teach critical thinking, to instill values, or to impart sufficient knowledge? Opinions differed. Theories about the source of the arms race were also divided, ranging from an emphasis on its institutional and technological causes, to questions of political and economic power, to issues of personal moral and political responsibility.

These differing perspectives reflect an underlying tension between those people who see knowledge as the key to understanding the nuclear threat, and those who believe that the valuing and decision-making processes are at the root of the predicament. This division is indicative of institutional differences between high schools and universities. While high school education is generally more sensitive to instilling thought processes and values, universities tend to emphasize the generation and distribution of knowledge and facts. Thus, those who interpret the schools as having failed to convey necessary information about the arms race have developed new, specialized courses to fill this gap, while others have developed curricula to enhance students' critical thinking and their ability to make choices.

There is clearly merit in both perspectives, and the polarization between the two may indicate a more fundamental problem: that knowledge and values have become separated in our society, with the result that our technical capabilities do not serve chosen ends. This problem may actually be at the root of the arms race itself. If so, it is essential to continue the dialogue begun at Emory. For this purpose, ISP has agreed to convene regional meetings that will bring together similarly diverse perspectives. □

### About Pugwash

International Student Pugwash is a student-run, nonprofit organization that serves to sensitize young people to scientific and social issues. Part of a worldwide movement that originated at the First Conference on Science and World Affairs, held at Pugwash, Nova Scotia, in 1957, ISP seeks to examine the moral and practical dilemmas raised by imminent problems of science and technology in the nuclear age. For further information and proceedings of the Emory University symposium, write International Student Pugwash, Nuclear Age Education Project, 305 Massachusetts Avenue, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002. Phone: (202) 544-1784.

### ASCD RESOLUTION ON NUCLEAR FREEZE

Aware of the potential world devastation and threat to human survival as nuclear weapons multiply in number, range, and power, the citizens of eight of nine states that have recently held referenda have supported nuclear freeze proposals. As educators aware of our responsibility to future generations, ASCD members wish to add moral support to efforts to end an ever-accelerating nuclear arms race.

Therefore, ASCD urges our national government to enter into negotiation to arrive now at an international nuclear freeze accompanied by cooperative international monitoring. ASCD urges full and open discussion in our schools of the nuclear freeze issue and other possible approaches to world peace.

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