

THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION

THE "big" issue, today, in the public prints, is Education. It makes little difference which magazine you pick up—for the masses or the elite—you are almost certain to be treated to a discussion of education, running anywhere from two or three to ten or fifteen pages long.

The cause for this apparently desperate interest in education is by now well known. The Russians seem to be beating us in the technological race. Some writers make this their main point. Others start out by acknowledging the "significance," of one sort or another, of the Soviet achievement and then shift into another gear, pointing out that the standing of a country in the arms race is not the best possible measure of its educational undertakings.

The sadly impressive thing, however, about all this discussion is that it doesn't get anywhere. You can read all those words, acquire familiarity with a lot of facts and figures, and still feel that the real problems, whatever they are, have not been touched. The reader can remain in this condition, despite the fact that many of the men who are today writing on education are the best men we have in the field and are earnestly devoted to its problems and issues.

What are we to make of this? One thing seems fairly clear. We are not getting anywhere in the great debate about education because we don't know where to go; we don't even know—except in terms of great generality—where we *want* to go. This is true of our society as a whole as well as of its educational problems. We are caught in a mess of bewildering contradictions and frustrations.

An obvious irony lies in the fact that the Russians have made us look a little silly in the one area in which we are generally conceded to be very good, if not best of all—technology. Why should this be? Out of at least a dozen possible or plausible explanations, we choose this one: That a society which develops minor excellences while neglecting the major concerns of human life eventually loses the

drive which makes even the minor excellences possible. Item: According to a study made by the Social Science Research Council, "fewer than half of the students in the upper tenth of their high-school classes go on to college. In addition to lack of money, a major reason for this defection is 'lack of motivation'."

This citation from the Social Science Research Council appears in the May Tufts *Alumni Review*, in a feature article entitled, "American Higher Education 1958," one of the better surveys of the educational situation in the United States. Concerning this matter of "motivation," the writers point out that the pay for college teachers is so low that graduating seniors often go to jobs in industry at starting salaries higher than the amounts paid to professors who trained them.

The problem of "motivation" is no doubt complex, involving many more factors than that of income. It can be said, however, that the low income of teachers is a serious commentary on the values of the society which underpays them, and a serious commentary on the bright students who refuse to become teachers because teachers are poorly paid.

Now men of a practical sort are likely to nod wisely, conceding that "ideals" are fine things to have, but going on to say that you can't solve "mass" problems on the basis of what may be hoped for from the distinguished few. Their position, in short, is that there is no help or salvation for a mass society except in treating it like a mass society and keeping it that way in the name of practical necessity.

This kind of reasoning, we should like to suggest, has got us where we are, and is responsible for our inability to go anywhere else, in our discussions of the problems of education. You cannot regard human minds as "mass" phenomena. Minds exist only as individual minds. The mass mind is not a *mind*.

You cannot decide for millions of youngsters what kind of idealism they are capable of, and set the level low, because there are so many of them. This is the betrayal of education. What is true for one youngster is just as true for thirty million youngsters. You can't tell in advance how any one of them will turn out. You can't make any assumptions about them, except, perhaps, statistically, and when you make statistically founded assumptions about all those youngsters, there you are, treating them like a "mass."

The Tufts survey reports:

The colleges and universities, some say, are not teaching what they ought to be teaching or are not teaching it effectively. "Where are the creative thinkers?" they ask. Have we without quite realizing it, grown into a nation of gadgeteers, of tailfin technicians, and lost the art of basic thought?

The failure of "basic thought" seems about the best explanation that can be offered for the present confusion in education and in our common life. To get on to the point, therefore, let us consider some questions or issues which "basic thought" ought to deal with.

There is one enormous contradiction in our society which our "basic thought" never touches. This contradiction should be regarded as the central issue confronting modern education. It should be posed in every class conducted by higher education, regardless of the subject taught. This, the teachers should be saying to their students, is the challenge, of your time. Other questions you may be able to avoid, but not this one. If education would do this, the entire educational system would come alive because it would be bringing young minds into contact with *reality*. Modern education is aimless and ineffectual, it may be said, because it is consistently evading contact with reality.

The contradiction is this: The central problem of our time is the uncontrollable power of the national State, yet virtually all the intellectual and technological forces of the country are devoted to increasing that power, while the idea of its control is left to be a concern of the sentiments.

It is plain enough why this contradiction is neglected. To consider it seriously you have to think about the State abstractly, as a socio-political phenomenon. You have to get outside the nationalist frame of reference and think impersonally like a true scholar or a historian. Nationalists are captive thinkers. It may be true, as nationalist assumptions dictate, that *our* national State is better than any of the others, but even if you arrive at this conclusion, you still have to study what is wrong with it, and nationalist assumptions are dead against studying what is wrong with your own nationalist State.

How do you get the strength and the courage to think about what is wrong with the nationalist State—*any* nationalist State—and to publish what you think? You get the strength and the courage from philosophy—the kind of philosophy practiced by Socrates and a few other great men. Socrates was a great educator—the greatest, perhaps, the Western World has known. From thinking like Socrates, men get courage and virtue. You can't get courage and virtue any other way. And you can't face the contradiction, the dilemma, of modern civilization without them.

What stops modern man—and most modern educators—from thinking like Socrates? This is an easy question to answer. Fear stops them. Fear of losing their lives, their fortunes, and what they suppose to be their sacred honor.

This brings us to the need of another kind of basic thinking—also done by Socrates. Socrates was able to cast out fear. He was really indifferent to what modern man calls "survival." He would have said—indeed, he did say—that the result of his trial and condemnation by the Athenian Five Hundred was that *he* survived, while they didn't. The Five Hundred went down in ignominy and disgrace.

But Socrates, you will say, was executed. Was he? Do you really think he was executed? Did he really "lose" in his conflict with the Athenian State? Was the figure of this man, remembered in the brilliant colors of the greatest moral drama of our Hellenic heritage, across more than two thousand years of history, a figure of *failure*?

Socrates was without fear because he thought of himself in the terms of his ideals, not in the terms of acts and attitudes which opposed his ideals. He thought he *was* his ideals. That, usually, is the way a great man is constructed. He cannot think of himself except as an embodiment of his ideals. This sense of identity governs his behavior. And for Socrates, the philosophical idealist, his identity was an enduring one with a future beyond death.

So, a part of realistic education concerning the dilemma of the modern State would take seriously the viewpoint of Socrates. Athens, with all its faults, was no doubt the best of the City-States of the Hellenic world. But this wasn't enough for Socrates. Socrates loved his country, but he was no nationalist. He wanted Athens to become better. He was philosopher, educator, and patriot—a well-rounded man, as we say. He has also been the *beau ideal* of countless American educators. This being the case, contemporary American educators had better begin to take Socrates seriously, if they are going to say anything worth listening to.

In our time, the problem of the National State is almost identical with the problem of War. As a matter of fact, the problem of war has created the character of the modern national State. Obviously, therefore, if we are going to do anything about the national State, we are first or at the same time going to have to do something about the problem of war.

Now it is an almost never-contradicted assumption of our time that the only *real* solution of the problem of war is to *win* the war. But this is precisely the assumption that is doing us in. You can't move from this assumption halfheartedly. You have to build for overpowering might. Common sense tells us that to win a thermo-nuclear war, you have to be *quick*. A long-drawn-out thermonuclear war is about the most awful thing we can imagine—short of the plans of the pacifists, who want no war at all—so we try to get ready to accomplish utter destruction of the enemy in a matter of minutes, hours, or days. And the enemy, having the same common sense that we have, and using it about as much as we do, are trying to get ready to do the same thing.

So this "necessity" of being eternally ready to win the worst war of history in a matter of minutes shapes the pattern and rationalizes the power of the modern national State. This is our condition of life. In this context we pursue our happiness and educate our young. Is it any wonder that the brighter ones among our young suffer on occasion from a lack of "motivation"?

It hardly needs pointing out that an education which fails to question the validity of this context is an education framed by a Procrustean bed of Nationalism. It has no freedom of thought. It has no moral imagination. It is condemned to triviality and insignificance fully as much as the Communist education which insists upon assumptions that equate with Dialectical Materialism, or whatever happen to be the current interpretations of Dialectical Materialism.

We have an education haunted by horrors, threatened by heresies, and loaded with non-essentials.

You hear a great deal about the coming rush of students to the colleges. The facts are recited in the Tufts survey:

Three million, sixty-eight thousand young men and women are enrolled in America's colleges and universities this year—45 per cent more than were enrolled six years ago, although the number of young people in the eighteen-to-twenty-one age bracket has increased only 2 per cent in the same period. A decade hence, when colleges will feel the effects of the unprecedented birth rates of the mid-1940's, today's already-enormous enrollments will double.

All these youngsters—what are they to be offered? More of the mass-oriented acceptance of impossible situations? More of this schizoid determination to increase the power of the national State? Dozens of courses in "social science" which have no more real relation to the problems of the world than the twitterings of birds? Less, in fact, since the birds at least make some sense to each other.

Education—the higher education—is supposed to be about the ultimate values of human life. It is supposed to concern the Eternal Verities. From

education, young men and women are supposed to gain an insight into what great men have thought and what great religions and philosophies have taught. You cannot convey this great tradition while the prevailing atmosphere of educational institutions is created by anxiety over the fortunes of the national State. Teachers who feel an internal or external compulsion to make regular expressions of this anxiety do not have the endowments which are required for transmitting the Great Tradition of Learning. Nationalist anxiety sterilizes "basic thought" as surely as the hemlock poisoned Socrates.

We have great problems. The students of this epoch ought to be told of the need for great solutions. For the problem of war, there is the solution offered by Gandhi. Things may be found wrong with Gandhi's solution, but are the things wrong with it as bad as the things wrong with finding no solution at all? For the problem of the national State, there is a great body of thought—unknown to all except specialists—devoted to the reduction or abolition of State authority. It comes as no surprise that one of the most acute political thinkers of our time, Dwight Macdonald, has practically abandoned politics as filled with futility. Here is a passage from one of his recent writings:

I think it's odd that anarchism never took any root in the Thirties when we were all looking for some way out, and I myself never came into contact with an anarchist, had no interest in anarchism, and became a Marxist—very much against my whole temperament. And this is odd for several reasons. First of all the American temperament is rather individualistic, and lawless, even, and, secondly, we do have an anarchist tradition from Benjamin Tucker up to the Wobblies, and thirdly, Anarchism gives a much better answer to our real problem than Marxism does because our real problem, as I have said, is the encroachment of the State. Marxism is revolutionary only about private property, which isn't a real issue any more, and is very reactionary on the function of the state, but of course this also explains the popularity of Marxism because while the centralized state is our real danger it is also necessary to the operation of a mass society based on large scale industry. So therefore Marxism is practical because it fits into the status quo, as in Soviet Russia, while anarchism is impracticable because it threatens it. And for Marxism I suppose you can generally

substitute socialism. The revolutionary alternative to the status quo today is not collectivized property administered by a workers' state but some kind of anarchist decentralization that will break up mass society into small communities where individuals can live together as variegated human beings instead of as impersonal units in a mass slum. The shallowness of the New Deal and the British Labor Party regime is shown by their failure to improve anything important in people's lives—their actual relationships on the job, the way they spend their leisure, their child-rearing, sex, art, all these kinds of things. (Cited in *Liberation* for May.)

There is more fertility of thought in this single paragraph than in all the millions of words which are written in neglect of the essential problems of the State and the wars of national States.

The students of today, who will be the citizens of tomorrow, are going to have to reconstruct their society. The one we have constructed won't last. It can't go on, that is, the way it is going, and is, the way it is going, and education must begin to provide the raw materials of original thinking about the real problems of the world. So far, we haven't even begun to define the problems in a way that the young can comprehend and come to grips with. You can't teach the young through a veil of fear without infecting them, too. If our great schools and universities do not face this fact, the work will have to be undertaken by private people, working in private ways, against the day when the world will be made up of private people who, at last, have learned how to be free.

REVIEW

A PHILOSOPHER STATESMAN

ARVEPALLI RADHAKRISHNAN'S *East and West* (Harper) establishes beyond doubt the value to the world of statesmen whose first calling is that of philosophy. For Radhakrishnan, to the confusion of some of his own countrymen, as well as his contemporaries in statecraft, seems quite incapable of a partisan perspective. When Radhakrishnan, after a request by the Indian government, forsook his teaching post at Oxford University to become Indian Ambassador to Russia, it was a question whether his outlook would be radically altered by political exigency. But while in Russia, he succeeded in serving Indo-Russian reactions fairly and at the same time brought out a monumental work on Indian philosophy, *The Principal Upanishads*—which was published in Moscow!

Now, as vice-president of the Republic of India, Dr. Radhakrishnan occasionally responds to invitations to lecture at leading universities, on both international and religious problems. The three lectures presented in *East and West* were delivered at McGill University in Canada (the Edward Beatty Memorial Lectures).

In one of these lectures, Dr. Radhakrishnan points out the dangers of a partisan approach to matters belonging to individual decision. For instance:

When we frame theories of religion we turn the being of the soul into the having of a thing. We transform what originally comprehended our being into some object which we ourselves comprehend. The total experience becomes an item of knowledge. The notions of God formed by men are not God Himself. The theories of God are tested by the facts or experiences of religion which prompted them. We should not take them as final and universally binding.

The Absolute which is beyond the distinctions of subject and object, as the divine subject illumines the place of cosmic objectivation, sustains and absorbs it. The world which science studies is the revelation of spirit. All nature and life are sacramental.

When men ignore what Radhakrishnan calls "the Universality of Fundamental Ideas, the transcendent unity underlying the imperial diversity of religions," the result may be the precipitation of violence. Sometimes the violence is overt, as in the Crusades of the Middle Ages, and sometimes it closes men's minds in relation to internal political affairs:

This world has long suffered and bled from religious intolerance. Even the political intolerance of our time which has become despotic, as universal and as bitter as any religious conflict has assumed a religious garb reminding us of the Crusades of the Middle Ages. The motive that impelled the Christian armies to march eastward was faith. But sincerity of faith is not a security against wild intolerance. The Crusaders thought that they were fighting for the Christian God against the Muslim God. They could not conceive it to be possible that the God of Islam might be the same God on whom they themselves relied. All too often men feel that their loyalty to their religious society absolves them from the restraints they would impose on their private actions. We become ambitious not for ourselves but for our religious organisations. The phenomenon is described by William Law as "turning to God without turning from self." All the lusts and prejudices of the heart are retained but identified with some supposedly religious cause. "Pride, self-exaltation, hatred and persecution, under a cloak of religious zeal will sanctify actions which nature, left to itself, would be ashamed to own." We are prepared to burn and torture in the name of love of God. Mankind seems to be involved in a corporate system of evil to which it seems to be in bondage. It appears as though some monster had taken charge of it, which possesses men and situations, making the best endeavours of honest men and using their good impulses for evil purposes. If God is love, He cannot be a jealous God. With jealous God goes the doctrine of the chosen people. If God's light is the light that lighteth every man, that He left not Himself without witness, the adherents of religions other than our own are not shut out from the love of God. There are alternative approaches to the mystery of God.

Dr. Radhakrishnan is suggesting a common ground on which the different religions may unite, but that this can be realized only when discovered in "the non-historical, the eternal." Why is religion of such great importance to the good

society? Simply because a true "one world" can exist only when the *conception* of religion allows constructive diversity of opinion. Dr. Radhakrishnan concludes his three lectures with the following paragraphs, after having made it clear that "the better world to come" cannot be built on a mere economic or political foundation:

We are living at the dawn of a new era of universal humanity. There is a thrill of hope, a flutter of expectation as when the first glimmer of dawn awakens the earth. Whether we like it or not we live in one world and require to be educated to a common conception of human purpose and destiny. The different nations should live together as members of the human race, not as hostile entities but as friendly partners in the endeavour of civilisation. The strong shall help the weak and all shall belong to the one world federation of free nations. If we escape from the dangers attendant on the control by irresponsible men, of sources of power hitherto unimaginable, we will unite the peoples of all races in a community, catholic, comprehensive and co-operative. We will realise that no people or group of peoples has had a monopoly in contributing to the development of civilisation. We will recognise and celebrate the achievements of all nations and thus promote universal brotherhood. Especially in matters of religion we must understand the valuable work of the sages of other countries and ages.

Peace is not the mere absence of war; it is the development of a strong fellow-feeling, an honest appreciation of other people's ideas and values. Distinctions of a physical character diminish in importance as the understanding of the significance of the inner life of man increases. We need, not merely a closer contact between East and West but a closer union, a meeting of minds and a union of hearts.

Mankind stems from one origin from which it has figured out in many forms. It is now striving toward the reconciliation of that which has been split up. The separation of East and West is over. The history of the new world, the one world, has begun. It promises to be large in extent, varied in colour, rich in quality.

More is needed, Dr. Radhakrishnan indicates, than a cozy cultural commingling of East and West. As Edmond Taylor says in *Richer By Asia*, we of the West need to gain a cosmopolitan

outlook. Our institutions and our history have been largely shaped by partisanship and aggressive ambition, while we see, in India, for example, simply a "backward" people, and fail to note that, from the standpoint of Indian philosophy and tradition, we are backward in another way.

We are very good at transforming the physical world, but can hardly even discuss the needed transformation of our mental attitudes. The Christian religion, at its best and purest, provides no more than an initial inspiration in this direction, and the only available "transforming" philosophy has come, not from the theologians and the professional philosophers, but from a few psychiatrists and psychoanalysts. It is no accident that Mr. Taylor, in *Richer By Asia*, combined the language of Indian metaphysics with the language of psychiatry. If the "spiritual life" of the future is to be "rich in quality," we suspect that a good deal more of this sort of synthesizing will have to take place.

COMMENTARY A DYING EPOCH

AN article in Peace News for May 30 helps to explain why the tragedy of Algeria moves from crisis to crisis, and illustrates the difficulties confronting General De Gaulle, the new French Premier.

The writer is Hein van Wijk, a Dutch attorney and pacifist. There are more than a million Europeans living in Algeria, he says, and very few of these people wish to return to France. Most of them are not even French! Mr. Van Wijk explains:

The majority of the Europeans in Algeria call themselves French, but about 800,000 of 1,200,000 of them are not. It is these who are the most fanatical of them all. This applies in particular to the Italians who claim to be Corsicans, and the Spaniards who pretend to be Basques. There is no way back for them.

The proposal of Raymond Aron, that the French Government buy out the settlers, can have little appeal to people who would live in poverty anywhere else, by comparison with their privileged position in Algeria as members of a "superior" race, entitled to countless privileges and advantages.

This is the explanation offered for the illegal seizure of power by the French Army and the European settlers—and the explanation, again, for the odd spectacle of Algerian Moslems dancing in the streets and cheering De Gaulle as their prospective savior! Jacques Savigny, in a letter to the *Nation* (June 7), suggests that this Algerian enthusiasm for De Gaulle might be compared to "the Ku Klux Klan taking over the South and the Negro population acclaiming the Klansmen as liberators." "Such a demonstration," he explains, "could only be construed as an act of self-defense, prompted by the fear of those in power."

Of the Europeans who control Algeria, Mr. van Wijk says:

To them an Arab is at best a native, but generally a *bougnoul*, *flic*, *bicot*, *krouya*, etc. These

names in themselves indicate something subhuman. Those who use these words, as "nigger" is used in America, feel themselves members of the ruling class.

They will never try to get into a personal relationship with these *bougnouls* and *flics*. The mere thought is abhorrent to them, especially to the race-conscious poor whites.

They know them only as part of a group, a group which is by nature inferior. This inferiority accords very well with colonial relations. . . .

While the colonial relationship lasts, an Arab, an Indonesian, an Indian, a Negro is never a human being, never an individual, but only a part of "they."

These "they" are always and for all times inferior. That is what is said and thought and felt by the Europeans who behave as if there could never be any change.

It is only in keeping with this attitude that the white ruler does not know the language of the colonial people. It does not concern him. The creatures who make these "noises" are not human beings in the strict sense of the word.

Not only the Algerian independence movement, but even attempts at small reforms, enrage the European settlers, who see in them the beginning of the end of their superiority, according to Mr. van Wijk. "Hence their fury," he says, "against anyone who recognizes the human being in the 'native' and strives for even the most moderate and gradual reforms."

This writer can find little hope of a peaceable solution for Algeria. The Europeans, he says, already think of themselves as "standing with their backs to the wall."

Thus the crime of colonialism is twofold. It is a crime against the "subject" people—that is plain enough—but it is also a crime against the colonials, whose minds and emotions become so warped with the delusion of their "right" to be colonials that they never, or almost never, recover their sanity, but carry their injured innocence to the grave.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves RUSSIAN EDUCATION—II

SLOAN WILSON, best known as the author of *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, contributed to a recent *Life* some paragraphs on the amorphous character of American education and its failure to shape habits of discipline in the young. Mr. Wilson at one time served as assistant director of the National Citizens Commission for the Public Schools, and, like the "Council for Basic Education," may be suspected by some of "reactionary" tendencies. Here, however, the supposedly "reactionary" critic says a few things worth listening to. Mr. Wilson points out that only twelve and a half per cent of present college students take any mathematics more advanced than algebra, and only twenty-five per cent are studying physics. Fewer than fifteen per cent study any foreign language. And, to bring the matter back to a comparison with Russia, while ten million Russians are now studying English, only eight thousand Americans are studying Russian. On this subject Mr. Wilson comments: "It goes without saying nowadays that the outcome of the arms race will depend eventually on our schools and those of the Russians. It is just as obvious, if less often pointed out, that the kind of understanding between peoples which some day may perhaps make arms races unnecessary also depends in large part upon education."

Mr. Wilson summarizes:

With the accident rate and the divorce rate as high as they are, a good case can be made for instruction in both driving and marriage, and there is no real reason why a youngster should not be taught dancing if the school has the extra money and the pupil has the extra time for it. But all too often the school provides courses in safe driving when it doesn't have the money for adequate courses in chemistry. The schools are becoming increasingly vulnerable to the charge that in trying to do everything for everyone, they are succeeding in doing almost nothing well.

The upshot is that many a brilliant youngster finds that his school has assumed the aspects of a carnival. In one room pretty girls practice twirling

batons. The sound of cheers is heard from the football field. The safe-driving class circles the block in new automobiles lent by an enterprising dealer. Upstairs funny Mr. Smith sits wearily on a stool in the chemistry lab trying to explain to a few boys that science can be fun, but who pays any attention to him?

It is hard to deny that America's schools, which were supposed to reflect one of history's noblest dreams and to cultivate the nation's youthful minds, have degenerated into a system for coddling and entertaining the mediocre. It is one thing to establish courses of varying purpose and varying degrees of difficulty to fit the talents of various individuals, but it is quite another to run schools in which most of the students avoid the tough courses—and get away with it.

In the *Saturday Evening Post* for April 26, Eleanor S. Lowman writes on "Washington's School for Young Soviets" as a means of comparing Soviet and American education for the very young. Miss Lowman discovers that the school maintained in Washington by the Russian government for children of Soviet and Czech diplomats seems to produce happy youngsters, despite its rigorous requirements. The school follows a pattern established in Russia, so that the return of these children to their homeland will require no notable "readjustments," and also because the Russians believe that their education is better than ours.

Soviet first-graders attend class either four or five hours a day, six days a week. Most American children go to school five days a week with maximum schooling per day of two hundred and forty minutes, and a minimum of two hundred. Soviet youngsters, even during their earliest years, carry off homework in little brief cases, and are expected to spend approximately an hour on homework in the first grade; four hours nightly, by the time they reach high school. Miss Lowman's general impression of the Little "Red" Schoolhouse in Washington was quite favorable, for the children seem not in the least oppressed or repressed by either their homework load or the discipline which rules their classroom. Miss Lowman's impressions include the beginning of the Soviet school day, marked by the usual chatter arrival:

Soon I heard the soft tinkle of the nine-o'clock bell. Instantly all play ceased. These boys and girls, like their counterparts all over the U.S.S.R., lined up before the doors to their classrooms. One by one, they entered, stood silently behind their desks until their teacher came in, bade them good morning and asked them to be seated.

The class monitor—a different student is selected each day—closed the door, collected the copybooks with the previous night's homework assignments, and gave them to the teacher.

Soviet children have a lot of homework. Usually, it is an hour in the first grade and ranges up to a good four hours nightly in high school. They used to have an even heavier load. However, two years ago, following the protest of school doctors about the need for children to have some time off to relax and play, a law was passed forbidding teachers to assign homework for Sunday or to require more than the specified daily maximum.

I looked at the copybooks. The penmanship was beautiful. The pages contained horizontal guide lines less than one-fourth inch apart, cross-hatched by diagonal guide lines about one-eighth inch apart. The letters placed in the small "boxes" thus created, were exceptionally clear and easy even for a foreigner to read. Just as the last copybook had been collected, the bell rang for the first recess. The children left the room row by row. The period had lasted forty-five minutes. Throughout this time these little children had remained completely quiet, attentive, giving no sign, through squirming or fidgeting, that they were restless or finding the long session too much.

The pace had been quick, precise, efficient. There had been no familiarity between teacher and student. The only reward for good work had been a prompt "correct." Not once had I seen their teacher smile at them or give any sign of warm support or encouragement of their efforts. On the other hand, there had been no reprimand for a wrong answer, no scolding for insufficient study of the previous homework assignment. She had simply dismissed the wrong answer to proceed to another child who knew the right one.

During their ten-minute break there was again a scramble among the boys for chess and checker boards. The girls played various circle games and talked among themselves.

There is something to be learned from this impersonal approach to classroom work.

Apparently, this sort of discipline does not lead the children either to seek praise or to fear blame. They simply do the best they can and let it go at that, confident that the teacher will do the same. Soviet children spend as many hours in class in ten years as American children do in twelve, and they don't seem to suffer from it.

So far as we can see, the issue of "Communism" doesn't really become involved in this comparison, for Russia is not presently Communist in any intelligible sense of the word. Very little in Russia's internal structure is a direct derivation from Marx or Lenin, though some of the enthusiasm connected with the theory of building a new and better society has obviously not yet departed.

But the lesson seems to be that no genuine *formal* education can be accomplished in a casual manner. The Greeks, from whom we claim to get much of our inspiration for democracy, were well aware of that. How, then, can the Russians be more concerned than we are with synthesis and vigorous discipline?

We shall have to acknowledge that the function of Democracy depends upon a sound and thorough educational program. An uneducated citizenry inadvertently calls down upon itself an increase of totalitarian controls, while an educated citizenry eventually demands that existing controls be lessened to allow breathing space for active and informed minds. Are the Russians now building the foundations of a future democracy?

The teachers in our country should not be blamed for our own weaknesses. They are usually hard-working, usually conscientious. But our teachers have inherited a system which, in trying to do everything at once has ended by doing nothing well, save, perhaps, in the area of personality adjustment in the lower grades. But "adjustment" is not all there is to learning, and, somewhere in the ascent from kindergarten to college, recognition of this fact must be made and steps taken to provide that sort of intensive education which that great Democrat, Thomas Jefferson, envisioned.

FRONTIERS " . . . within Our System"

IT was to be expected that someone in the insurance business would find reason to object to the "Alonzo" story in MANAS for May 7. One reader—only one, however; the rest who wrote in liked it—felt that Alonzo misrepresented the insurance business and the people in it, and was "self-righteous" about it, along with everything else.

This particular correspondent explains that she went into the insurance business to get away from loyalty oaths and other disreputable phenomena found in the field of education. She writes:

I entered Insurance as an Idealist. And I can report that while it has all the faults of a profit-economy business, I have found it a thousand times more *free* and permissive than education. I am free to operate with the highest honor and sincerity, integrity, and service that I as an individual am capable of. This was not so in education.

There seems no need for comment, here, except, perhaps, to notice that the insurance business is hardly a front watched closely by the FBI, so that its freedom from loyalty oaths and such does not bespeak intrinsic virtues.

The reasoned "defense" of the insurance business offered by this correspondent is as follows:

Insurance is a service industry. It is as decent as anything else in our system—not only the things which relate to money. It seems to me the harangue about profit is silly, within our system. I know of practically no enterprise—including humanitarian and religious ones—that do not get involved. It is however, a matter of emphasis. There can be, and is, in some instances, more of the mutuality principle in the insurance field than in a vast number of profit industries. It is not pretense that a social service is performed. . . .

The logic, here, is sound enough, within, as the writer says, "our system." This, however, is the whole point. Just to make sure no one would miss this point, MANAS printed an editorial in the same issue as the Alonzo story, stressing the idea that Alonzo stands *outside* our system. The editorial said:

. . . a man like Alonzo, who looks at our society and finds lots of things wrong with it is a valuable man. He is not arguing for some other system. The trouble with arguing for some other system is that there will be things wrong with that system, too, and while people are arguing about the systems and which is the best they usually ignore what is wrong with *both* or *all* systems. They can't talk about right and wrong, but only about which system is best, or which one is the Lesser of Two Evils. You can't really get anywhere that way.

We have no doubt that the insurance business has its quota of sterling characters. We have no doubt that such persons can be found in the usual proportion in all businesses. The argument wasn't really conceived at this level. As Alonzo said:

"It [the insurance business] is about as decent as anything else in the part of our system which relates to money—you know—things which have to do with exchange. Bankers and insurance people don't *make* anything. They get a ride on the system. If you have enough money and know how to manage it, you can make a lot more. Like now, the people with a lot of money can work it out so they keep on getting richer just by playing around with the tax laws. They don't add to the wealth of the society; they just use the system."

Even this sort of criticism may be found within the system, and is by no means original with MANAS or Alonzo. It is the theme of books like Cameron Hawley's *Executive Suite* and is of only minor interest, here. There are plenty of people to conduct sharp arguments within the assumptions of the system.

What Alonzo is after is the kind of thinking which looks at what people do regardless of whether or not it is consistent with the system. To say that a certain activity works well in our system is not sufficient justification, for Alonzo.

As for this matter of insurance, let's go back to the Desert Island approach. In a face-to-face community of a couple of hundred people, insurance would seem pretty silly. If you have a fire, your neighbors pitch in and help you rebuild your house. The interdependence of people is a spontaneously recognized reality, not a statistically adjusted financial relationship. Warmth and human kindness

determine the adjustment, not the law of averages. You could argue that warmth and human kindness are not as "dependable" as the law of averages; there's some small print behind the human qualities, the same as on insurance policies. But we doubt very much that any isolated community would feel it necessary to take on an insurance set-up until it grew so large that people began to be indifferent to one another.

Then you could say that reliance on the spontaneous feelings of people to help one another in a disaster isn't "practical" in a mass society like ours. You could say this, but that wouldn't make insurance an ideal solution; and saying it tends to make us *accept* human indifference to the misfortunes of others as more or less the expected thing. It is a question, whether, in the long run, the institutional solution for misfortune is not the worst possible solution, since it operates so inhumanly.

Apart from all other questions, it is a fact that the solution of insurance involves a large business in which it is necessary to make a profit. Insurance companies are not supposed to "take chances." Every state has laws designed to prevent the insurance companies from taking chances. This is very different from the situation of the small, face-to-face community. Here, when you help somebody who has had tough luck, you may never be paid back. You make a sacrifice. You take a chance. Instead of buying stock in an insurance company, you give some of what you have when it is needed. What you get, by doing this, is a kind of relationship with your fellow human beings that cannot be obtained by any other means. If it be said that you can do this, "anyway," and why not have insurance to make the burden easier, we can only reply that the tendency to distribute all risks statistically, including the hazards represented by the Community Chest and other large scale fundraising agencies, is a tendency to free the individual from any sort of personal responsibility for the misfortunes of others. The depersonalization of such responsibility is a fundamental trait of the mass society. It makes people, with their individual needs and individual generousities, into faceless units. It is of a piece with centralized governments, enormous industrial

organizations, and mass armies. "Within our system," the depersonalization of responsibility is a perfectly logical development in the further dehumanization of mankind.

Somewhere along the line of this argument, the question of "charity" is bound to come up. Isn't it a fine thing, someone will say, to eliminate "charity"? Well, charity is what you make it. The odium carried by this word is a mood sponsored by the deserving "haves" and directed at the undeserving "have-nots." The man who spontaneously helps a friend doesn't think about it being "charity," and neither does his friend. The trouble lies in the immoral way we think about helping one another, not in the act of helping.

The fact of the matter is that we are all in some way dependent upon one another. When you make this dependency remote by interposing the pattern of actuarial statistics between the individual and his fellows—and, in addition establish the convention of taking a profit off the top—you go a long way toward hiding this basic fact.

Now the "philosophy" on which the justification of insurance is founded is quite obvious. Insurance is one of the many measures men have devised to control and subdue the irrational aspects of their environment. A man can cope with the law of averages. Once he has a table of frequencies worked out, he can predict what will happen on a statistical basis. He applies "science" to the irregularities of life (fires, hold-ups, accidents, death) and "provides" for them in advance, through insurance. This, as our correspondent says, is a "service," and the company or man who provides this service is paid for two things: (1) his skill in computing probabilities and (2) his labor in getting together enough money to cover a large enough number of people to make his statistics valid. On top of this are the charges for overhead, selling and advertising expense, and profit for the stockholders.

There are several writers of considerable repute who have examined insurance operations. Recently, a new book, *The Grim Truth about Life Insurance* (Putnam), by Ralph Hendershot, has come out which is aggressively critical of the insurance business. This was not, however, the level of Alonzo's

criticisms. Alonzo claimed that you ought not to capitalize the law of averages. Actually, if the truth were known, Alonzo came out for a moneyless system in which all men would produce goods and services of direct utility. And, as our correspondent points out, you could hardly equate Alonzo's point of view with our existing system. Alonzo, of course, didn't try. But if you rule out of discussion all the things which do not equate with our existing system, you will not have much to talk about. Many of the good things of life equate rather badly with our system!

A portion of our correspondent's letter which we haven't quoted pressed the *argumentum ad hominem*: Don't you carry insurance? MANAS, fortunately or unfortunately, has no tangible assets, save for some addressing equipment that won't burn and is too old for anyone to steal. But that is an accident or rather an attribute of the MANAS-type non-profit corporation. It is quite conceivable, on the other hand, that one who more or less shared Alonzo's views on insurance would have a policy or two. In California, for example, the law practically compels you to carry car insurance, and corporate operations usually observe all the conventions of business because money is involved—the money of various people, who may not all embrace such odd opinions.

The fact of the matter is that if you are going to carry on any sort of activity which costs money—like publishing a magazine—you have to conform to a great number of legal and other requirements which may not be to your liking. That you have to do these things, as a price for doing other things, need not make you say that they are fine things, nor should it oblige you to remain silent about what you think is wrong with them.

People have to do a lot of things—some of them silly, some of them bordering on immorality—to relate to the existing society in a material way. For example, if you pay taxes you are supporting war. If you want to run a business you have to pay taxes. You may need to run a business in order to do things you can't do unless you do run a business. So you pay the taxes, a large portion of which is used to prepare for war. And you *object*. Some people

refuse to pay the taxes and explain why. You decide what is best for you to do, and do it, with full recognition that you're bound to take part in *some* activities which represent undesirable tendencies in your society.

You also do your best not to sound self-righteous. This becomes difficult, if you happen to have ideas of right and wrong which are not generally shared. You can beat your breast and say, "I too, am guilty," and then let go with both barrels, or you can choose some other way of expressing a humility which you feel ought to be expressed, just to keep the record straight. But you have no reason to keep silent because, with all other men, you share in the common imperfections of the human race. An effort to point out the inconsistencies you are able to recognize may not be a negligible service, and someone has to try to point them out, with or without self-righteousness, and with or without a perfect "consistency."