

History Teachers' Forum

THE CRITICAL ISSUE IN SOCIAL TEACHING*

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It is a great pleasure to be with this group again today; with so many of you who have such deep concern for the order and peace of this disturbed and nervous world. From our association throughout the years, I can bear witness that social science teachers have ceased to be conscious of a special responsibility for contributing in a definite way to that social understanding which would beget order and harmony and security. I doubt if, a decade ago, any one of us dreamed that we would come to see such days as these—days when we would hear on every hand phrases such as: "the gravest hour in the world's history," "dictatorship in the saddle," "parliamentary government at the crossroads." These phrases, so laden with anxious forebodings, startle us, but they force us to recognize realities. We know that we face grave issues—that now the whole idea of government by popular will is at stake.

It is difficult to speak on such a subject as I have chosen, without using many phrases which are trite. In speaking on "The Critical Issue in Social Teaching," one can do no more than set forth our common thoughts about the gravity of our responsibility, so with the understanding that what I say on the subject is not in a spirit of telling but of asking, I venture to speak my concern as to the critical issue which social teaching must face.

I shall begin with a quotation from Howard Mumford Jones in his article "Patriotism—But How?" He says:

While discussion clubs incline a serious ear to speeches on "Can Democracy Survive?" and our better correspondents smuggle dispatches out of Europe showing that the dictator countries are committing economic suicide, few people seem to inquire why, if the fascist and communist nations are economically insane, they constitute so serious a menace to political democracy.

The Jones thesis as to why these nations constitute a serious menace to political democracy is that they have developed a zeal for their political doctrines which we in democratic America seem to have lost for our doctrines. If this

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be so, teachers of the social studies are confronted with these questions: Can we teach so as to build a faith and zeal for democracy which can prevail against the fanatical, impassioned zeal which other nations build for their seductive social doctrines? And, Can we do this with methods which are consistent with democratic philosophy and processes?

Perhaps, first, we should decide definitely whether we shall consider it to be our objective to build faith in and zeal for democracy. Now there are those who will still say, "No, it is not the teacher's task to do this." These believe in stopping short of this objective. They believe we should confine ourselves to the more trepid objective which is usually termed social understanding, and on this they would rely for the security of our institutions. But when doctrines supported only by lukewarm social understanding encounter doctrines carried forward by the momentum of faith and fanatic zeal, they stand to lose. This is the menacing situation which democratic philosophy faces today. Perhaps in the days less disturbed than these, social understanding was enough support for the doctrines of democracy. But now democracy needs more—it needs renewed allegiance—a zeal for it, an abiding faith in it. Other nations are building allegiance to their political philosophies by the use of all the tricks which crowd psychology knows, and the results amaze us. We observe entire populations falling under the spell of political seducers, who with the tricks of banners, and marching bands, and simply worded slogans, build a fanatical devotion which is beyond our usual concept of what patriotism is and ever should be. The penetrating, driving power of this mass emotion which is being set abroad in the world, arising from these methods, is a terrifying thing to all who wish liberty and freedom to survive.

Are teachers going to do anything about it? For my own part, I believe teachers have a definite responsibility for teaching democratic philosophy—not merely as one of the social philosophies, but rather as our philosophy—the philosophy upon which our institutions are founded—the political doctrine to which we owe every liberty we possess. We are not in a day to debate about democracy, but to proclaim it. And we need faith in it, a zeal for it which will withstand the impact of all the forces which would destroy it.

How can we get such faith? Shall we stoop to undemo-

cratic techniques to meet this menace? In the stress of the emergency which we face, we are tempted to fight fire with fire. But we dare not do this, for if democracy stoops to the use of the same political tricks which dictatorships use, then democracy ceases to be democracy. We cannot use those methods and keep faith with democratic ideals, for at the heart of democracy is faith in the dignity, and the worth, and the good sense of each individual. Such faith does not permit of playing with individual emotion to such a degree that political reasoning is befogged and beclouded.

Thus circumscribed in method and procedure, we must trust that a faith and zeal for democracy builded upon reason, founded upon understanding, resulting in a people of calm assurance of the right, will prevail against fanatical devotion for other doctrines builded from psychological trickery. We have every cause to put our trust in such principles. There is sound reason to believe that faith so built will live through many a test which zeal built upon the play of mass emotions cannot and will not endure.

If we are to try this course, there are considerations which must be faced squarely. The first imperative is to build faith in democracy, not to create doubt about it, to build conviction and not cynicism. To be specific, we have lived through a period when any glib youth with a teacher's license or a college position, who has never himself assumed a single responsibility for an administrative decision, in the name of academic freedom, could, with insinuating generalities, cause his pupils to believe that public life is all corrupt. The logical conclusion which youth draws from that kind of teaching and based upon such insinuation, is that the American system itself is a failure. Now sensible people who know all of the truth, know that such a generalization is not fair. There is of course, far too much that is corrupt. But those who know all the truth, know that for every official that is going wrong, there are many, many others who are honestly and conscientiously trying to do their duty—many of them under pressures which are breaking their bodies and their spirits. We need a body of teachers in the classrooms who will teach the whole truth, and if they do, they will teach that we have honesty in public office in abundance. And on this we can build faith, not cynicism. There is much in our nation's life in which we can have faith, much of which we

can be proud. There is so much tradition of liberty and freedom that our history astounds us with the marvel of the quality of our heritage. We do not lack at all for that which will build a faith and devotion to American ideals which will endure and prevail, if we but teach the whole truth. In saying this, we do not wish for any unhistorical history, any doctoring of the true story of American development. All we ask is that the American story be told in its true and correct perspective. There is so much of good that the American story needs no doctoring. What we need, especially, is to teach the good and the bad in their proper and correct proportion; if we do this, we can well trust to the result.

I know you are thinking all this means propaganda and indoctrination. You say: "You are asking for propaganda which is in no wise different from that which dictatorships adopt in their educational systems. Because this question always arises, it is necessary that we think clearly as to the distinction between true education and propaganda. Carl Joachim Friedrich recently drew a distinction between propaganda and education which we all need to remember. He says: "Propaganda always aims at getting people either to do or not to do some very particular thing. Education, on the other hand, is fundamentally concerned with moulding and developing a human being in terms of an ideal, as far as his nature allows it." The difference, therefore, hinges on these two objectives. The objective of propaganda is to get people to do or not to do a particular thing. The objective of education is to mold and develop an individual in terms of an ideal. In propaganda, we use the individual for a purpose; in education, we are making him in terms of an ideal. In propaganda, we are interested in what people will do; in education, our concern is what they are.

Now if our concern is with true education, if this concern is with the developing of human beings in terms of an ideal, we must first adopt the ideal. We must decide what kind of human beings we wish these children of ours to be. In the field of the social studies, I believe that we can decide upon molding our children according to ideals about which we will have no disagreement. Our ideal would be to develop people who love liberty; who love justice and fair play more than they love gain; who believe in law; who believe in harmony; who love peace; who believe in living according

to the law of kindness rather than the law of cruelty; the law of love rather than the law of hate. In setting forth to mold individuals according to these ideals, we need to realize that such procedure is not propaganda, but education in its truest and finest form. Education, without an ideal, has no point, and no value.

It is of the utmost importance that the teachers of the social studies see this distinction between propaganda and education clearly. Social studies have been in danger for some years. Our situation has been serious, because much of our social teaching has lacked any philosophy upon which we could base the choice of anything for a teaching purpose. Sometimes it has looked as though the social studies have been nothing more than intellectual ruminating, dawdling here and there over a hodgepodge of facts, with no evidence that there is a central philosophy which ties the facts together. What we teach needs to be taught according to whether it will help us to mold our pupils according to ideals of liberty, justice, fair play, law—and consideration for the dignity and worth of human personality.

Now this task of molding individuals according to these ideals at once forces us to recognize that the first imperative is to awaken and arouse a new appreciation of the spiritual values which inhere in a democratic philosophy. Development of appreciation is always a difficult educational task, but development of appreciation of anything inherently spiritual is the ultimate in educational difficulty. We must strive to get at the heart of what democracy implies. Its significance does not lie in form of government. It is deeper than that. The true significance of great concern to us lies in the quality of the spirit which runs through all human relationships. It is the unique spirit which democracy brings which we must appreciate. These things which are the unique qualities of democracy are after all things of the spirit. And sometimes they do not immediately result in more food or better clothing; but without these things of the spirit, more food and better clothing are of no use. We must know that whenever democracy begins to sacrifice its unique spiritual values in the interest of material progress, then we are in imminent danger. Whenever our eyes are so focused on rising standards of living that it blinds us to consideration of human rights, we face the menace of traveling the same

road as the other nations of the world. It is sacrifice of human values which characterizes dictatorship.

Thomas Mann says, in his *Coming Victory of Democracy*:

Democracy as a whole is still far from acquiring a clear conception . . . of the fanaticism and absolutism of the totalitarian state. It willingly sacrifices all culture and humanity for the sake of power and victory, and secures for itself in this unfair way advantages and advances in the battle of life such as have never been seen before, whose effect upon civilization is wholly bewildering. And yet, in order to be able to survive, democracy must understand this new thing in all of its thoroughly vicious novelty. Democracy's danger is the humane illusion, the virtuous belief that compromise with this new creature is possible, that it can be won over to the idea of peace and collective reconstruction by forbearance, friendliness, or amicable concessions.

Now what is it of which Thomas Mann warns us? That we must understand this "new thing." And what is the "new thing"? A thing which sacrifices culture and humanity for the sake of power and victory. We must recognize it for whatever it is, and in the classroom strive definitely and specifically to mold individuals to abhor and resent, and reject and oppose that trend toward sacrificing culture and humanity for the sake of power and victory, whether it be at home or abroad. Culture and humanity can be sacrificed too easily for the sake of power and victory. We may not be discerning enough to see it, but the unique things for which democracy stands—liberty, freedom, humanity, culture—can be offered up as sacrifices for material prosperity. Nations can be brought step by step to the insidious belief that they should give up humanity and culture, and liberty, and freedom, in order to have clothing, and better automobiles. This is the insidious temptation which our nation faces. It is the temptation to which other nations have yielded, we fear, to their sorrow.

In the last analysis, can we so teach that we may cause our pupils to cherish as they should those higher values which inhere in democracy? This is after all the critical issue which we face. Can we cause our pupils really to understand how precious are the rights and privileges of an American citizen? It is important that we teach our pupils how to vote, but that is secondary to their appreciation of the fact that we still *may* vote. It is important that we teach the processes of our government, but infinitely more

important that we develop individuals with deep-rooted appreciation of the philosophy of our government. Whatever we teach about processes—about elections, organization of our governmental units, tariff, monopoly of public utilities, the courts, taxes, our wars, our national crises—all these need be interpreted according to their bearing upon the growth or limitation of freedom, liberty, humanity, and culture. This is the emphasis which the social studies will need to make if we contribute our part to the preservation of the American system.

Last night Anthony Eden spoke in New York City. Undoubtedly you read what he said. I am quoting one paragraph:

We know that we are destined, in our land, in our generation, to live in a period of emergency of which none can see the end. If throughout that testing time, however long or short it be, we hold fast to our faith, cradle it in stone, and set steel to defend it, we can yet hand on our inheritance of freedom, intact to the generations that are to come.

It is obvious that the place where the faith of the American people in democracy will be cradled in stone and where we shall set steel to defend it, as Mr. Eden puts it, will be in the classrooms of our schools. May we trust that we can find the way to do it?