

Education for Peace and International Understanding

Red Cross interest in the promotion of peace is well known. It is reflected once again in one of the resolutions adopted by the XX International Conference of the Red Cross in Vienna and in the Round Table meeting which took place in The Hague last year, at which a number of notabilities in the Red Cross movement expressed their views on the contribution which the Red Cross could make to peace and international understanding.

In that meeting stress was laid on the importance of education in the spirit of peace and on the necessity for an international civic spirit.¹ The United Nations Children Fund has just published a special number of Assignment Children² on a subject closely related to that discussed at The Hague : " Peace and Children ", and we believe our readers will be interested in some of the ideas in that publication and which we quote below.³ Dr. Georges Sicault, Director of the UNICEF European Office in his preface said :

Slow but important progress has been achieved in humanity's difficult road to tolerance and peace. The XIX century saw the abolition of slavery; the XX, decolonization, and will see equal rights for women. But we are living in an epoque when atomic discoveries are like a sword of Damocles poised above the world and the threat is all the greater because man today, under a veneer of civilization, still seems incapable of controlling violence. This is

¹ See " The Red Cross as a Factor in World Peace ", *International Review of the Red Cross*, November 1967.

² FISE-UNICEF, Neuilly/Seine (Paris) 1967, No. 6.

³ Our translation.

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obvious from recent history and the frequency of wars during the last hundred years.

It is hoped that there will be sufficient respite to enable the younger generations to espouse the cause of international solidarity, diverting them from ideologies of violence made all the more formidable because they are now propagated by new and powerful mass communication techniques. There is perhaps no more urgent task unless it be the need to promote on the widest possible scale economic and social development in those regions of the world where populations are unable to break out of the circle of misery, sickness, hunger and ignorance.

Efforts have so far been inadequate. Foreign aid and price-fixing policies for raw materials produced in these countries must be reviewed. It is however no less necessary for action to be concentrated on the younger generations which will be the pillars of the world tomorrow, to prepare them for their responsibilities and to guide them towards that spirit of solidarity which should prevail among men, transcending frontiers, cultures and ideologies.

Young people living in the rich countries should be infused with the will to assist those less fortunate; there should be hope for those who suffer that their own efforts and the assistance they receive will lead to a better life.

A world at peace, better living conditions, improved physical, mental and social welfare through the efforts of all, would be a worthy cause to which young people could devote their energy. Their keenness might not fall short even of sacrifice. It must be admitted that youth's latent aspirations have often been exploited in the service of war. Would it not be better for them to serve peace, to give the younger generations a rôle to play in establishing genuine international solidarity.

In addition, youth throughout the world has become a force conscious of its scope, ready to assume its responsibilities. It will not brook attempts at hegemony. It wishes to throw off the yoke of all neo-colonialism. It rebuts any propaganda intended to impose rule by one form of civilization or another. Youth is still generous and enthusiastic. Care must be taken that its immense potential is not diverted by factious leaders to destruction when there is so much constructive work required in the world. Horizons must be

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broadened beyond the narrow limits in which the great majority of men live. Today, when distance is no obstacle and oceans can be crossed in less time than it used to take to carry family crops to the market, youth must be united and imbued with pride in the heritage of the human race and with an urge to do more in ten years than their forbears in ten centuries.

Civilization, philosophies and religious fervour have their common denominators. Buddha, Confucius, Plato, the Gospel, the Koran, all call for understanding, tolerance and respect of values which through the centuries have become a common heritage. The recommendations of the United Nations General Assembly are but repetitions of ideas which were prophetic in former times and could be guides to thought and deed tomorrow.

For our riches reside not only in the product of our work or in accumulated capital; they are to be found in our culture, our civilization, museums or monuments. They are of that universal order of thought and art which, throughout the ages and on all continents, is the manifestation of man's will to excel himself.

Efforts have been undertaken to teach youths to know one another better as individuals, as members of one nation, as world citizens. It is to be hoped that they will be followed by many others and that governments will consider that one of the essential objectives of their policy for children and youth must be to teach, if not love for one's neighbour, at least respect for the individual through civilization in all its forms.

The task is urgent and must not be delayed. It is no longer possible for nations to live in isolation, for men to live in ignorance of each other. The day is nigh when the whole world will be no more than one large village. In this new society it will be necessary not only to respect the fundamental rights of man but also to establish new bonds of solidarity on a world scale which alone can promote better conditions for the under-privileged and hence maintain peace in the world. There is no alternative. This is what we must begin teaching youth today.

In an article entitled "Towards an International Education?" Mrs. Rachel Cohen points out that the child today whose attention is directed to the world in which he lives, feels intuitively the ties

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which are woven between him and others, and the educator's mission is to help him to be aware of those others, or in other words to respect differences among men, to appreciate them and perceive through them the common characteristics and needs of all men. She writes :

Education for international understanding can and should have a place in the everyday life of every educator aware of his mission. It is part and parcel of any form of education.

Space does not allow a discussion here of all aspects of an educational programme seen from the angle of international comprehension. Some examples however may be given:

Geography: In the summer of 1950, UNESCO organized a course of international studies in Montreal on the teaching of geography and international understanding.¹ Notwithstanding differences of language and culture a large measure of agreement was reached. This is manifest proof of the tolerant spirit with which geographers are endowed by their training. The teaching of geography seems particularly suitable to prepare children to live in today's world. Taught actively and not book-bound, it will bring realization to the child that it is not the centre of the universe and that one of the outstanding features of life in the world today is the ever-closer solidarity among different countries. Whilst it strengthens love of one's country, the study of men's efforts to adapt their environment to their needs can give rise to esteem for all peoples and thus promote comprehension and co-operation among the nations.

The teaching of history too has a privileged place in this type of education. The study of bygone civilizations of all kinds is a basic item in the study of human evolution. It is important that books and textbooks be expurgated of all bigoted sectarianism or one-sided views.

Mrs. Cohen adds : " Thus the outlines are visible of a vast programme of international culture and civic education which may be summarized as the study of man in his physical and social environment in time and space. The study of art and music dovetails into this pro-

¹ See *L'Enseignement de la géographie* ; UNESCO, Ed. 51. 11, 1952.

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gramme... The keen interest displayed by children proves that it meets their needs and is appropriate to their mentality”.

“ Education oriented towards international understanding is not then a programme super-imposed on the traditional curriculum ; it is a part of school life, new and absorbing, not only profoundly changing school structures and time-tables, but especially the attitudes of mind of those working there, both children and adults.

A word must also be said about Kesera Karunatileke’s article “ The Rôle of United Nations Agencies in the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace and International Understanding ”. The writer first explains the reasons for intervention by international institutions—by UNESCO to be exact—in this so important field of education and peace.

“ A clause in the Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, in which that body proclaims its faith in peace and the future of the world, states that war is engendered and the defences of peace must be constructed in the minds of men.

That future belongs to youth and it is for that reason that youth must be imbued with a spirit of peace, international understanding and reciprocal respect among people. The defences of peace must henceforth be built on the foundation of the goodwill of young people who will tomorrow be called upon to meet their responsibilities as members not only of a local, but of a world, community.

The world being in a state of change, new discoveries and rapid developments in transport and communication are constantly remodelling the way of life of all human beings wherever they are. Consequently, traditions, concepts and philosophies of the present generation may not necessarily be those of the coming generation. Hence the necessity to understand the problems facing youth and to prepare them to adapt to adult life.

Youth becomes aware earlier than in former times of its place in the community and is eager to play its part in the civic, social and educational life of society.

The next few pages give an interesting account of the practical educational effort to cultivate a co-operative spirit in youth. A number

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of steps have already given practical results, particularly the setting up of a network of "associated schools". The programme mentioned earlier, "international civic education", was put into operation in a system of associated schools which already in 1953 included 33 secondary schools in 15 different countries. These schools were nominated by the UNESCO National Commission or the Ministry of Education in each country. Each school adopted for study three subjects related to the rights of man. Subsequently the number of associated schools increased considerably.

In addition, a Committee of Experts was set up by UNESCO to study principles and methods of education in international understanding.

It was not simply a matter of teaching ideas connected with international understanding or facts related to the world today. The idea was not to teach international understanding as a subject but to educate for international understanding. Education for international understanding is possible only through encouraging the proper spirit, for attitude and feeling precede learning. It was therefore not sufficient to teach international understanding like historical facts are taught. School children had to be made to feel that they belonged to a world community. In them had to be nurtured psychological behaviour conducive to a desire to do something merely out of sympathetic understanding for others without distinction of race, language, religion or social circumstances.

The author then outlines a programme of education for international understanding in which the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights have an important part as a proclamation of lasting moral values.

A word might usefully be said about the content of this education and about the methods of achieving its objectives. The programme is of course aimed at arousing youthful interest in the major problems of contemporary society and especially at forming their attitudes in such a way as to fit them to meet their responsibilities as members of the world community. In fact, for the educational

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programme for international understanding to be effective it is not sufficient to inculcate ideals of peace and universal brotherhood in youth alone, but in adults too, the family, and particularly the members of the teaching profession, for it is the latter who exert the greatest influence on the attitude and behaviour of youth, society's most vulnerable group.

The programme of education for international understanding experimented in UNESCO-associated schools covers three main subjects, namely foreign countries, human rights, the United Nations and its specialized agencies. It must be pointed out that these subjects do not embody a complete curriculum of education for international understanding. They are merely the hub around which the teacher may give rein to his imagination to encourage his students to take part in the creative work of understanding for other peoples and races.

Study of Civilisations and Foreign Countries. — The study of foreign civilizations is capital in education for international understanding for it is one of the best means by which children may acquire a healthy and well balanced personality, a favourable attitude to understanding—including tolerance, recognition of the equality of men—a capacity for objective thought and resistance to the appeals of propaganda of all kinds. The study of foreign countries in childhood is of great value, for the lack of objective knowledge on other countries causes many peoples to draw wrong conclusions or imagine “stereotypes” of others.

As the study of foreign civilizations does not easily fit into present school programmes, it was in schools where education was not dominated by concern to pass examinations that teachers have been able with great success to apply programmes of which the sole aim is to make students familiar with the way of life, characteristics and aspirations of a foreign country, frequently very distant. For example 50 Swiss schoolgirls of 11 and 12 years of age who chose Japan as a subject for special study knew nothing to start with of Asian civilizations and constantly confused Japan and China. However, the post programme tests showed that the children had made progress.

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In primary school, when children are still young, this subject is taught by the “centres of interest” method. This enables students to learn about several different countries from the angle of “centres of interest” such as diet, clothing, transport, games, festivals and the family life of other peoples. Popular tales and legends as well as abridged works of literature and biographies of great men in the countries studied, provide a good introduction to the study of their civilizations. What must be avoided in this type of teaching is the creation of stereotyped pictures of other peoples.

Several secondary school subjects can promote international understanding, the most suitable being history, geography and foreign languages and literature. Current teaching methods tend more and more to consider subjects such as history and geography from the human angle, and this tendency fosters in youth tolerance and understanding for other peoples. For example, when the geography of India is studied in Western countries, it is useful to explain to students why the standard of living is so low in India; they are shown how the population explosion is one of the most serious problems in that country.

It is unfortunate that in school programmes in many countries history teaching is centered solely—or mainly—on national history. Where school programmes include world history, the study of this subject is oriented to education for international understanding by showing students the interdependence of peoples and cultures.

The Study of Human Rights. — The purpose of this is to create in young people the qualities and conditions necessary for mutual understanding among nations. These qualities are given prominence by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights itself, namely tolerance, recognition of the equality of all peoples, a sense of social justice and moral responsibility, intellectual honesty and receptivity to new ideas without prejudice.

In this field of learning it is particularly necessary that students experience in their daily life the principles they learn. The teaching of human rights is not an end to itself; it is a complement of what children should feel in their relationships with each other and with their teachers. If a school atmosphere or a teacher’s attitude runs

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counter to the principles taught, those principles may seem to the children mere abstractions devoid of sense. Nothing is more significant in the forming of attitudes favourable to international understanding than the daily practice of human rights in school, the family and the community.

The teaching of human rights, particularly in primary school, bears fruit only when students have already studied foreign countries and acquired basic knowledge enabling them to understand why men differ in their ways of life, their customs, their appearance, their economic development, their religious beliefs and political creeds. The study of human rights shows young people that in spite of differing ways of life and economic and social progress, all peoples have at heart the same aspirations.

In associated schools instruction on human rights is in two parts: 1) their historic development against the world background of reforms and social revolutions and against the national background of changing traditions and social norms; 2) their importance in contemporary international treaties and official declarations of the United Nations.

The purpose of the historical part is to teach young people that interest in human rights is not something new but has always been an ideal or an objective for all civilized people. Historical study lays stress on notions of human rights as defined in the basic laws, religions and philosophies of different peoples. Instruction is oriented particularly towards the progress achieved in this field during the last two centuries, or more exactly since the American War of Independence and the first Declaration of the Rights of Man adopted by France in 1789 after the revolution.

One French school has chosen as the theme for study in this programme "the history of slavery" under the general title of the conquest of the rights of man. Students have collected documentary material on the causes of slavery at different times, the attitudes of writers and philosophers over the centuries, and the protests against slavery from defenders of freedom. This special study has enabled the students to understand better the tributary problems of racial discrimination and colonialism.

Associated schools have recourse more frequently to the second method of teaching human rights. This involves the interpretation

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of basic texts in the form of declarations and conventions adopted by the United Nations on human rights.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the main subject for study in most of the associated schools. In view of the complexity of this Declaration the work is confined to specific aspects of law, such as civic rights, economic and social rights and the application of these laws in the students' surroundings. The teachers, with realism, endeavour to make students realize that the Declaration is a programme of action, an objective, and that most States have not yet reached a stage where they grant all their citizens all the rights included in the Declaration.

The writer's review is sufficiently wide to lead to the conclusion that the results of the programmes of education for international understanding have by no means been negligible. He states however "there is a gulf between official declarations adopted by member States of international bodies and action undertaken to give effect to those declarations". International and national institutions based on a humanitarian ideal have an important part to play in the defence of peace. As far as youth is concerned the mission of the Junior Red Cross and Red Crescent throughout the world cannot be ignored, whether it be the practical work accomplished day after day in various fields of mutual assistance or that to foster peace, as demonstrated in the seminars and youth meetings. To mention but one example, "Rendez-vous 67", in Ottawa, was attended by 400 young members of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies from many countries; two of the subjects they discussed were "International Co-operation" and "Youth and International Understanding".¹

As Mr. C. A. Schussel, Director of the Junior Red Cross Bureau of the League, said on that occasion :

"An International Junior Red Cross Study Centre is a major event for all those taking part, for the whole of Red Cross and perhaps even all of humanity seeking stability, happiness and peace. Individually, we can do much to bring happiness to our fellow men; together, united in enthusiastic teams, we can multiply to infinity the efficiency of our efforts".

¹ See *International Review of the Red Cross*, November 1967.

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The Round Table meeting we mentioned and which was convened to study the action of the Red Cross as a factor in world peace, was also concerned with the rôle of education in this general effort. It even took an interest in the content of such education, pointing first to "the Red Cross principles and the Geneva Conventions, without however forgetting human rights and the efforts made to protect the civilian population ; the principles of the United Nations Charter introducing the peaceful settlement of conflicts ; and finally the necessity of mutual assistance".

This dovetails in with the ideas expressed in the articles we have just analysed. It is to youth that ideas of peace and human solidarity must be imparted in order that the world tomorrow may be more united and peaceful than it is today.