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LIBERAL EDUCATION IN AN INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY

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One of the most important advancements taking place in our society today is the penetration of learning and intellectual values into the work-a-day world of business and industry. This is as significant in its own way as the tremendous scientific, technological and product-consumer developments we have seen taking place all around us. These traditions of learning and the benefits of liberal education have had notable impact on the business world and the industrial society in which we live and work. Today we are relearning what we never should have forgotten—the pertinence and immediacy with which the past speaks to the present.

Dr. Mortimer Adler, our lecturer for this "Major Issues" series, is one of the main exponents of this revival of learning. An eminent philosopher, educator and speaker, he is one of the founders and chief practitioners of the "Great Books" concept of learning through group discussions. He is now a resident of San Francisco and founder and director of the Institute for Philosophical Research.

Liberal Education in an Industrial Democracy is the third of three lectures being delivered to the people of Industrial Indemnity and their guests in San Francisco and Los Angeles. The other two lectures in the series are *The Democratic Revolution* and *The Capitalist Revolution.*

LIBERAL EDUCATION IN AN INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY

INTRODUCTION

The democratic and capitalist revolutions, which I have described in the two preceding lectures, confront our society with an educational problem that exceeds, in magnitude and difficulty, the educational problems which past societies have faced and solved.

We have not solved the educational problem that confronts us. Nor have we yet turned our efforts toward trying to solve it. Most Americans do not know the shape this problem takes; and it would almost seem as if most American educators have deliberately tried to avoid recognizing it. Yet the problem is one of the most serious

that our society faces; and with the changes that lie ahead, it will become even more so. If it remains unsolved, it will become the most serious threat to the future of our society—its safety, its sanity, its prosperity.

With few exceptions, American educators tend to be satisfied with the accomplishments of American education in the last fifty years. This is the clearest and surest indication that they do not understand the problem our country is called upon to solve; for if they did, they could not possibly deceive themselves about what has so far been achieved.

They would know that everything we have done in building the largest school system the world has ever seen amounts to no more than a bare first step toward the solution of the problem of giving liberal education, the best conceivable, to all the children whom that school system is intended to accommodate. They would frankly admit that no one at present knows how to solve this problem. They would recognize that the problem is so difficult that it may take us the next hundred years to solve. Above all, they would see that, until the problem is understood in all its difficulties and accepted as the most serious problem we face, the intelligence, energy, and wealth required to solve it will not be applied to the task.

I hope that what I have just said makes clear that this lecture has no solution to offer. Its only contribution is a statement of the problem itself, and a recognition of its difficulties. If most Americans—and most American educators—could be persuaded to accept the problem I am going to try to state, and were also fully persuaded of the need to solve it, we might then have some hope of solving it in the next hundred years.

Those who have followed the two preceding lectures in this series have some background for understanding the problem of liberal education in an industrial democracy.

The lecture on the democratic revolution pointed out that, with the advent of democratic institutions in the 20th century, universal suffrage was established for the first time, and the distinction between a ruling and a subject class was abolished.

The lecture on the capitalist revolution pointed out that, with the maturation of industrial production in the last hundred years, human life and energy has at last been emancipated from grinding toil, and the distinction between a working class and a leisure class has been effaced. If the capitalist revolution in the next fifty years completes what the industrial revolution began, we can look forward to the first truly classless society in history—a politically

classless society in which all men are citizens and members of the ruling class; and an economically classless society in which all men are capitalists and members of the leisure class.

It is the extraordinary difference between such a classless society, emerging now for the first time in history, and all the class-structured societies of the past, which helps us to understand why an industrial and truly capitalist democracy is confronted by a novel educational problem and one it will find so difficult to solve. This contrast between the classless society of the future and all the class-structured societies of the past also helps us to understand the nature and difficulty of that problem.

I, therefore, propose to begin by discussing education in the class-structured societies of the past. After that, I will try to summarize some of the immediate consequences for education of the democratic and industrial revolutions which transformed American society in the first fifty years of this century. I shall then be in a position to state the educational problem we now face, on the solution of which the future of a democratic and capitalist society depends.

EDUCATION IN ALL THE CLASS-STRUCTURED SOCIETIES OF THE PAST

By the "past" I mean the whole of recorded history from the beginning until 1850 at the earliest, and perhaps even 1900. And when I say "all" past societies, I allow for no exceptions; because no matter how they differed economically and politically—with or without slave labor, with or without constitutional government—all past societies were essentially class-structured. And that, of course, means *class-divided.*

In all the pre-industrial aristocracies (by which I mean "oligarchies") of the past, human beings were sharply divided into two political classes. A small number belonged to the ruling class, the nobility surrounding the throne in monarchies or the citizens, always a small elite group, in republics. The great mass of human beings lived outside the political pale, either as chattel slaves or serfs, or as unfranchised persons. They formed a subject class, without any voice in their own government and often without any political rights or privileges. Since man is by nature a political animal, this vast horde of human beings thus lived a strictly subhuman life.

Concurrently, in all past societies, human beings were also sharply divided into two economic classes: a leisure class of men with sufficient property to subsist—and, better than that, to live comforta-

bly—without doing any work for subsistence; and a working or laboring class of men who barely subsisted by the sweat of their brows or were kept alive by charity. For the most part, the same few men who formed the ruling class also belonged to the leisure class; and the same vast horde of "forgotten men" who were the slaves or toilers were also the politically subject or disfranchised masses. For our purposes, it makes no difference whether the toilers were chattel slaves or not. Since man leads a distinctively human life only in the pursuits of leisure, those who were forced to spend their whole life in toil, from childhood to death and from dawn to dusk, day in and day out, thus lived a strictly sub-human life.

The preceding lectures have acquainted you with the distinction between *living* and *living well.* Merely to live is to subsist, as *brutes* subsist in the struggle for existence. To live well is to lead the truly human life of a *rational* animal, which is totally beyond the capacity of brutes. In all the class-structured societies of the past, most men were brutalized. Only a few had the opportunity to live humanly.

Now in all these societies of the past, who were educated and why were they educated? You know the answer at once, or cannot help inferring it from what has already been said. Only the few, who were born in freedom and destined to lead free lives, were given any schooling and were expected to continue liberal learning throughout their adult years. For all the rest, prior to 1800, there was no schooling at all, not even what we have come to call "vocational schooling," for such vocational training as they received, they received on the job. For all the rest, there was no thought of liberal learning in adult life; for the mass of men neither had any time for liberal learning, nor any use for it.

I have used the phrase "liberal learning" in sharp contrast to "vocational training." By "liberal learning" I mean *education,* not merely in school but also after school in adult life. In all past societies, education was identified with *liberal* education. The phrase "vocational education" would have been completely meaningless to our ancestors, just as vocational schooling was completely unknown to them.

The word "liberal" simply indicates the purpose of education. Why were the few sent to school? Why were they expected to continue learning in adult life? They were sent to school to prepare them for the free life of leisure and political responsibility. They were expected to continue learning in adult life because learning is the essence of all leisure activities, including the activities of the

political life. In all the pre-industrial aristocracies of the past, in which education was only for the few who were economically and politically free, its whole purpose was to school them in youth for the good use of the freedom they would possess in adult life. The obvious connection between the words "liberal," "liberty," and "leisure" should always serve to remind us that the education of free men must always be liberal and devoted to leisure.

This should be clear, and it would be understood by all the educated men of the past, but unfortunately it is not clear in America today, and it is not understood by most of those who, in our society, regard themselves as educated men. The reason is that the twentieth century American does not understand the meaning of leisure. There is no more egregious misunderstanding abroad in our land than the American misconception of leisure. Before we proceed any further, it is necessary to remove this misunderstanding.

Sleep, Play, Work, and Leisure

If you were to ask most Americans how they divide the time of their lives—day by day and month by month—they would give you the following answer. They would say that, outside of vacations which should obviously be devoted to relaxation and play, they divided the rest of their time into three parts. Approximately one-third, they would tell you, had to be devoted to sleep and other biologically necessary activities for the maintenance of health and vigor. Another third, they would say, is spent in labor or toil to earn the means of subsistence; though as we pass from the forty-hour to the thirty-five or thirty-hour week, that is bound to become somewhat less than a third. The residual third is free time or, as Americans are given to saying, "leisure time." Since they identify leisure with all forms of sport, recreation, relaxation, diversion, or amusement, they thus complete the picture of the threefold division of human time by making play the third main component which, as labor or toil diminishes, tends to become the main content of a waking life.

If this were true—if sleep, toil, and play exhausted the content of a human life—there would be no point whatsoever to education when that is properly understood as liberal. Men do not need liberal education to sleep well. They do not need liberal schooling to earn a living, even though it may be misused for that purpose, just as intelligence can be misused for the purposes of aggression. And men certainly do not need liberal schooling in order to play effectively; in addition, the more they spend their adult life in play, the less time they have for liberal learning. In all the pre-industrial aristocracies of the past, liberal schooling and adult liberal learning

was needed by the few, not merely because they had time free from sleep and labor, but because they used that free time for leisure, not for play.

To understand the distinction between labor and leisure, on the on the one hand, and between leisure and play, on the other, it is necessary, first of all, to avoid speaking of "leisure time." The word "leisure," properly used, refers to a kind of human activity, which is different from toil and play as other kinds of human activity. Instead of speaking of "leisure time," then, we should speak of "free time"; i.e., time free from the biological necessities of sleep, exercise, nourishment, etc., and from the economic necessities of labor for subsistence. Such free time is time free either *for* leisure *or* for play.

The Greek word for leisure—which is Latinized in the word *"schola"* connotes schooling or learning. Leisure activities are all the activities in which the individual learns something, and thereby grows morally, mentally, and spiritually. The phrase "schoolwork," which children use, indicates that learning feels like labor to them because it has been made compulsory for them. But whereas toil may be compulsory for adults who have little or no property except their own labor-power, learning is essentially voluntary, and the virtuous man engages in it freely as a matter of right choice.

Leisure activities, therefore, consist in all those intrinsically satisfying activities in which a virtuous man engages precisely because they are their own reward. They are not done for extrinsic compensation. The members of the leisure class, in all past societies, had their subsistence assured. If they were virtuous men of leisure, they did what they did, not for compensation in the form of subsistence, but for their own human good and the good of their society. In contrast, toil or labor consists of all those activities which are done for the sake of extrinsic compensation in the form of subsistence.

If I may ask you to recall the terms I used in the preceding lecture, this can be summarized by saying that leisure consists of activities that are liberal in quality (i.e., creative and instructive) and liberal in aim (i.e., productive of the goods of civilization or the human spirit), whereas, at the opposite extreme, labor or toil consists of activities that are servile in quality (i.e., mechanical and stultifying) and servile in aim (i.e., productive of wealth or the goods of subsistence). In between the extremes, there are, as we have seen, some activities which are mixed in character, such as the kind of work that is liberal in quality, even though it is servile in aim. In-

sofar as it is liberal in quality, such work has the aspect of leisure. Even though it is usually done for compensation, my sense of the matter is that some men would continue to perform the managerial and technical tasks of industry, even if they had enough wealth not to need compensation or be forced to work for a living; and they would do so because they are virtuous men and it is the form of leisure they most enjoy.

Now play is neither labor nor leisure. Being intrinsically enjoyable, it resembles leisure in that men do not expect compensation for it. But since, for the most part, it is not instructive, since it does not occasion profound moral, mental, or spiritual growth, and since it does not produce the goods of civilization or of the human spirit, *the virtuous man feels no moral obligation to play.*

The most that can be said of play on moral grounds is that it is *permissible*, in very restricted amounts. It is permissible for two reasons: first, because a certain amount of play serves, like sleep, to wash away the fatigues and tensions that result from toil and leisure; and second, because a certain amount of frivolous pleasure is harmless in itself and introduces variety into human life.

But neither reason makes play necessary or indispensable, as toil is necessary for all men who must work for a living, and as leisure is necessary for all men who wish to live virtuously and well. It is completely possible to live and to live well, with little or no play. The three absolutely essential parts of human life are sleep, work, and leisure. Play can be added as a fourth part to enrich its variety and to do for some men what sleep fails to do.

The Two-Part Life in Societies of the Past

What I have just said can be concretely illustrated by going back to the pre-industrial aristocracies of the past. In those class-structured societies, most men led two-part lives.

On the one hand, the few who belonged to the ruling class and the leisure class did not have to work for a living; and so, apart from the time they spent in sleep, their waking hours were free for leisure or for play. If they lacked virtue, they frittered their lives away in pastimes or diversions of all sorts. A certain proportion of the leisure class were actually playboys or wastrels, not men of leisure. But those who, through being virtuous, were genuinely men of leisure devoted all their free time to liberal pursuits. For conviviality, they engaged in conversation, not cajolery, carnivals, or riotous living.

One need only think of Greek philosophers and scientists, like Ar-

istotle, Plato, Hippocrates, and Euclid; of Roman statesmen, like Cicero, Seneca, and Marcus Aurelius; or of 18th century Americans like Adams, Jefferson, Hamilton, and Madison, to realize how hard it would be to imagine such men spending any considerable portion of their time in play or amusement. When such men, having served their country, retired from political life, it was to have more time to devote to the cultivation of the arts and sciences.

On the other hand, the mass of men who belonged to the subject class and the working class were forced to spend most of their waking hours in toil or labor for subsistence. They, too, had little time for play. Their two-part lives consisted of sleep and work.

With sleep common to all the two-part lives in past societies, men were distinguished from one another by the occupation of their waking hours. The slave or toilers produced the means of subsistence—the necessities, comforts, and conveniences of life. The playboys wasted their time and made nuisances of themselves. The virtuous men of leisure engaged in liberal pursuits and produced the goods of civilization—its arts and sciences, the institutions of the state and of religion.

The Meaning of Education

If, then, we consider these modes of life in all past societies, we see that education takes it meaning—its whole meaning—from the part it played in the lives of the leisure class, and, even then, only in the lives of the virtuous few. It played no part in the lives of the masses. It meant nothing to those who turned out to be playboys. Such liberal schooling as they may have received in youth was entirely wasted on them. But for those who devoted their adult life to the liberal pursuits of leisure, liberal schooling served as preparation for the learning that is involved in all the activities that constitute the leisure of adult life.

Let us be sure we understand the full significance of this last point. From the 5th century B. C. to 1900, it was generally understood that schooling was at most the first phase of education and at best a preparation for the more substantial phase of education that can be accomplished only in adult life, never in youth. No one in the past ever supposed that a schoolboy—there were few or no schoolgirls—could be a learned or educated man, no matter how bright the child or how good the school. No one ever confused schooling with education; and, therefore, no one ever spoke of "adult education" as we do, in the manner of an afterthought or with the connotation of something quite dispensable for anyone

who has been sufficiently schooled. Everyone recognized that education could be achieved only in a whole lifetime, and then only in some limited degree. They conceived the educated man as one who, toward the end of his life, has managed to acquire a little of the wisdom which is the goal of learning. If we can understand why they would not have called a boy just emerging from school a wise man, we should be able to understand why they would not have called him an educated man either.

When the mediaeval universities first established the various academic degrees, the degree of Bachelor of Arts was given at the end of the first and lowest stage of learning and at the commencement of the higher or more advanced learning. It certified that the young person had been initiated into the life of learning. It did not signify that he was an educated or learned man. It meant only that he was now prepared to go on studying in the faculties of law, medicine, or theology; or that he now had rudimentary skill in the liberal arts and might, if he wished, go further in the mastery of these arts. Whether the Bachelor of Arts would ever become an educated or a learned man was entirely up to him. If he did not put the schooling he had received to the uses of his own education, it was entirely wasted on him.

Just think, in contrast, how most Americans regard their sons and daughters at the moment of their graduation from high school or college. While they must realize that even the best-schooled child is hardly wise, they talk and act as if college graduates had completed their education. This is merely one sign of how little the problem of education is understood in 20th century America.

There are other signs. In all past centuries, liberal schooling was general or common, not specialized or differentiated. Prior to 1900, the few children who went to school all went to schools of the same kind and were given the same discipline or taken through the same course of study. Since the liberal purpose of the schooling was the same for all, namely, to prepare them for the liberal pursuits of leisure in adult life, the content of liberal schooling was the same for all. It consisted of training in the liberal arts and an introduction to the whole tradition of human learning.

Training in the liberal arts meant nothing more than acquiring the skills of learning itself, such skills as reading and writing, talking and listening, measuring, calculating, and observing. An introduction to the tradition of learning was achieved through the reading of the books that constituted the intellectual accomplishments of our civilization and that conveyed such wisdom as men had been able to accumulate. There was no supposition that the growing

child could *master* the world of learning. The purpose of schooling was merely to open the doors of that world in the hope that, with the skills of learning acquired, the growing person would eventually find or make his own way among things of the mind.

I do not need to tell you what goes on in our schools and colleges for the purpose of contrasting that with what I have just described. You know how much of it is trivial, how much purely vocational and in no sense liberal; and to what extent it is highly specialized and differentiated rather than general and common. You also know how little is demanded of our children in the way of genuine intellectual work. Here, too, the present stands in sharp contrast to the past.

In the past, schooling exacted a great deal of the child. The standards were high, the work was hard, and children were expected to stretch themselves to the last ounce of their ability. Those who were responsible for instituting and administering the schools understood that the life of leisure is a hard and strenuous life, not an easy or indolent one. It was, in their view, a life of the most intense activity, much more arduous and exacting than the drudgery of labor, and no less tiring in spite of all its inherent satisfactions.

If schooling was to prepare a child for life—for this kind of life—it could not begin too early to make the child put every ounce of effort into learning, with no time for play except what might be necessary in the form of gymnastics for the sake of strengthening the body. The sooner the child took learning seriously, the better he would be prepared for the serious learning he had to do when his schooling was finished. The harder the child was made to work at the tasks of youthful learning, the less difficult it would be for him later to face the even harder tasks of adult leisure.

Let me sum this up by saying that, in all the societies of the past, the end of education, in school and after, was the mental, moral, and spiritual growth of the person, with wisdom as the ultimate goal to be approached as a man reached the end of his life and approximated the ideal of an educated man. Since this end could not be achieved in school, it was understood that adult learning, throughout life, was a moral obligation, and one that any virtuous man of leisure regarded as his personal duty to discharge. But it was not merely a duty to his society and to himself. Learning throughout life was also an essential ingredient in a man's pursuit of happiness, and the satisfaction of his deepest human desire—his desire to know.

So much then for the meaning of education in the past, when it had no meaning except for the few who were men of leisure, and vir-

tuous men at that. I do not mean to imply by what I have said that education was in all respects the same in all past centuries and in the varying societies of Greece, Rome, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, or the 18th century. It varied from epoch to epoch, and from one phase of civilization to another. But what I have said about it characterizes its common traits throughout the history of the West from the 5th century B.C. right up until about 1900.

THE IMMEDIATE CONSEQUENCES FOR EDUCATION OF THE DEMOCRATIC AND INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTIONS

While these revolutions have not yet matured to the point where we have a truly classless society in this country, the political and economic changes which have taken place since 1900 have all been steps in that direction. Certainly, as contrasted with all the pre-industrial aristocracies of the past, it is no exaggeration to say that ours is no longer a class-structured society, even though faint traces or vestiges of the old class divisions may still remain on the fringes of our society.

The easiest way to grasp this basic change is to recognize that we no longer have anything like a leisure class in America. By the same token, we no longer have a working class as such; for with the disappearance of the one, the other also tends to disappear. Whereas in all past societies, human beings were divided into men of leisure and working men, in our society, human time—the time of everyone's life—is divided into working time and time for leisure which many, who do not understand the difference, use for play instead.

The simplest way of summarizing the human result of this basic change is to say that all men now have an opportunity to lead the same kind of life—a truly human mode of life instead of the subhuman life that most men were forced to lead in the past. All are called to the duties and privileges of citizenship. All are expected to do some work in the sphere of subsistence; and, over and above that, all have plenty of time to cultivate themselves as human beings. Where Marx, reacting against the injustice of the privileges of leisure enjoyed only by the propertied class, made it a cardinal tenet of the *Communist Manifesto* that all men shall be liable to labor, we now have the vision of a better society than communism in which all men shall be liable to leisure—as much leisure and as little labor as possible.

Furthermore, as automation progressively reduces the amount of time that men must spend in purely subsistence-work, the amount of time free from sleep and labor will increase to the point where

even some indulgence in play will not seriously encroach upon the use of free time for leisure. Then it will be possible for all men to lead a four-part life, in place of the two-part lives to which men were restricted in the past—a four-part life in which sleep and play are for the sake of work and leisure, and in which the reduction of work is mainly for the expansion of leisure.

As these changes have taken place and as they continue to occur progressively, the educational consequences which follow in their train have been as revolutionary as the changes themselves. They manifest themselves both in the quantitative expansion and in the qualitative deterioration of the American educational system in the first fifty years of this century.

Looking at the period from 1900-1950, we see that in each ten years of this period the total number of children in school has steadily increased, and the average length of time that children spend in school has been extended. It goes without saying that this has been accompanied by comparable increases in the number of schools, the number of teachers, and the size of the expenditures. In all the respects in which such quantitative increases can be measured, the statistics follow the path of a constantly accelerated rate of change. One statistical comparison can, therefore, be taken as representative of all the rest. In 1900, there were 500,000 children in the high schools of our country, or about 10% of those eligible for such schooling. In 1950, there were 7,000,000, or over 85% of the boys and girls of high school age.

But it is not only the number of children we must take into account when we make such comparisons. If you went back to 1900, you would find that the 500,000 children then in high school came from a fairly homogeneous part of the population, with the same kind of social and economic background and with the same kind of future occupations ahead of them. In addition, those 500,000 children represented a fairly selected range of intelligence, educational aptitude, and interest. In 1950, the picture is changed in most respects. The 7,000,000 children in high school are qualitatively heterogeneous in respect to the educational accomplishments and interests of their parents, the variety of occupations into which they will go, and, above all, the range of their own endowments and aptitudes for education. They run the whole gamut of the scale of human abilities—from the child who is just a little above those placed in asylums for the feebleminded to the highly gifted child who is superior in intelligence and other endowments.

The changes just described are the inevitable consequences of democracy and of industrialization. When a society decides to make

all human beings citizens, it cannot avoid the responsibility of providing schooling for all of them in childhood and youth. And when a society is able to produce the wealth it needs mainly by means of machines instead of by human and animal muscle, it rises above the need for child labor, and so is able to extend the length of time which all children can spend in school. To prevent unemployment, it becomes increasingly necessary to keep the children in school and off the labor market.

But these are not the only results. The character of education and the content of schooling also change drastically under the impact of the expanding school population and with the shift in the character of that population from a relatively homogeneous group of children to one that is as heterogeneous as it can be. As I said a moment ago, one word can be used to describe all the resulting qualitative changes in the content and methods of schooling itself—*deterioration.* Let me support that charge by enumerating some, if not all, the respects in which American education has steadily deteriorated in the last fifty years, and by discussing in some detail a few of the most calamitous aspects of this decline.

The Deterioration of American Education in the First Half of the Twentieth Century.

As the immediate result of the quantitative changes produced by the democratic and industrial revolutions, American education, both in theory and practice, has declined in the following respects.

(1) The curriculum of the elementary and secondary schools, and even of most so-called "liberal arts" colleges, has been diluted or watered down. During the last fifty years, the solid subjects have ceased to be required of all students, and many of them have even disappeared from the course of study in our secondary schools, which deal with children at an age when they should receive rigorous training in the liberal arts and be given the solid substance of liberal schooling.

(2) Vocational courses of every conceivable kind—some of them almost inconceivable—have more and more replaced the solid substance of the liberal disciplines. Not only are such courses without any educational content, but what is worse, they are all directed to the wrong end—preparation for earning a living, instead of preparation for living well.

(3) Instead of giving all the students in our schools and colleges the same general and common preparation for the life of

learning and leisure which all of them now have the opportunity to enjoy in their adult years, our schools have introduced more and more specialized and differentiated courses of study, supposedly adopted to the individual differences of students and with a view to preparing them, not for the same mode of life which is open to all free men, but for the different occupations into which they may go. Instead of postponing such specialized study, where it is necessary, until after basic liberal schooling is completed, preprofessional and other forms of technical specialization have been introduced into the high school and the college. None of it should occur prior to the B. A. degree.

(4) Worst of all, the children are very early divided into the sheep and the goats. The goats are those whom the educators think are not up to the difficulties of truly liberal schooling, and they are shunted off into purely vocational, trivial, or other illiberal programs. The sheep, and they are comparatively few in number, are given the diluted and wholly inadequate schooling that now passes for training in the liberal arts and sciences.

(5) In our public schools and in many of our colleges, both the best and the worst, and those which pretend to be liberal as well as those who make no such pretense, the basic educational standards have been relaxed to the point where the average child is able to get by with very little work and the bright child goes completely unchallenged. This, by the way, is one of the causes of juvenile delinquency on the part of the more intelligent and energetic youngsters, whose wits and energies our schools fail to command and harness.

(6) As the family and the community as a whole have become derelict in the performance of their educational responsibilities in the rearing of children—their physical care, their moral training, and their intellectual development—the schools have become more burdened with extraneous tasks that schools were never intended to perform, and which they should not be expected to perform. In our delinquent community, the schools have become more and more burdened with concerns about the child's physical and mental health, his recreational opportunities, his occupational future, his moral formation. All of these things distract the school's attention and divert its energies from the main business to which it should be devoted.

(7) In addition, the parents, instead of encouraging the schools to give homework and make the students work hard at their lessons, often oppose such policies because they no longer want to be bothered with helping their own children in the process of learning. Since the adult population in America spends more and more of its free time in play rather than in leisure, they tend to think that "school-work" should also be more and more like play instead of leisure. The way in which the child's parents misuse the time they have free for leisure creates an atmosphere in the home which is the very opposite of what is needed to encourage the child in the difficult and arduous tasks of learning.

(8) What most Americans call "adult education" is either nothing but remedial schooling for those who did not have sufficient schooling in youth, or, worse, some form of avoctional pursuit, such as folk-dancing or basket-weaving. As a consequence of this almost universal misunderstanding of the true meaning of adult education, as the absolutely necessary continuation of liberal learning in all the years that follow school, American parents and American educators misconceive schooling as if it were the whole, or even the main part of education when, in truth, schooling at its best is but the beginning of the life of learning. Both the content and methods of basic schooling are seriously deranged when the purpose of schooling is mistakenly thought to be the *completion* of education and the *mastery* of the fundamental things which should be learned.

(9) With the expansion of the school system and the phenomenal increase in the number of teachers and administrators required in it, the educational profession has become organized like a labor union or an industrial association and has come to use all the public pressures which its power commands in order to advance the interests of its members rather than the common good of public education. The "organized educators" of the country have, in the last fifty years, worked to increase the number of schools, the number of teachers, the salaries and tenure of teachers, etc., but they have simultaneously opposed efforts to turn American education from the path it has followed to its present low state. The average American teacher, who has been certified for the classrooms of our public schools by a state normal school or college of education, is not himself or herself a liberally schooled individual; and those who do not themselves have the light of liberal learning can hardly be expected to lead others to it.

(10) Finally, while we have progressively diluted the liberal substance of schooling, we have progressively extended the number of years it takes a boy or girl to finish the first phase of education with the attainment of a bachelor's degree. We take more and more time—from four to six years more—to do less and less. In addition to the serious educational failure this indicates, it also results in the prolongation of immaturity. In all past centuries, men and women began a mature life before the age of twenty, most of them much earlier, at sixteen or eighteen. Since many of our children remain in school long after that, they also remain immature for a much longer period of their lives, and this both delays and shortens the period of maturity in which the most important learning that human beings can do must be done.

I would like to add a few brief comments to the foregoing bill of particulars against American education in the last fifty years.

I do not need to take your time to give you evidence for most of the charges I have just recited. Anyone who has children in the schools and colleges of this country has all the evidence he needs. I am sure you have heard your children, as I have heard mine, refer to "solids" as if they were that small part of the curriculum which any sensible youngster should avoid like the plague. It would be hard for them to imagine a school in which the whole curriculum consisted of "solids" and in which every student was required to work through a solid course of study. Yet such were the schools and the requirements in all the centuries prior to this one..

You know as well as I do the range of vocational or "life-adjustment" courses which have been introduced into our schools and colleges, and how many children get nothing but such training after the elementary years in which they do learn a little—very little—about how to read, write, talk, or listen. But you may not realize why vocational training and "life-adjustment" courses have been substituted for liberal education. You may think that the reason is the necessity to prepare most of our children for the occupations or trades they will engage in to earn a living.

If you think that, you forget that those of our ancestors who engaged in servile work did so successfully without the benefit of schooling, and those of our ancestors who entered into the liberal professions were trained for their vocations either in actual practice or in post-graduate schools, following the completion of liberal schooling.

You may also be unaware that vocational training in school is for the most part totally *useless.* In most of the trades or occupations into which our children go, the training has to be done all over again on the job; and nothing would be lost at all if the ineffective manner in which it is done in school were completely omitted. On the contrary, much would be gained, for all that wasted time could then be put to good use by the restoration of the solid substance of liberal learning.

The real reasons for the rampant vocationalism in our schools and colleges are twofold. The first is that vocational training provided an escape for the teachers. When, beginning in 1900, the teachers were faced with the expanding and ever more heterogeneous population in their class-rooms, they discovered that they simply did not know how to give liberal schooling to *all* the children, half of whom were below the average intelligence for the population as a whole. Since all the children had to be kept in school, and kept there for more and more years, the teachers sought refuge from their inability to do what should be done by substituting for that something they found themselves able to do. Vocational training was an expedient for teachers, not a necessity for students.

But the teachers are not alone responsible for the *ersatz* schooling that resulted from vocationalism. The second reason for this degradation of American education lies in the attitude of American parents. You know as well as I do that most parents send their children through school and college—and often make great personal sacrifices to able so—for the wrong rather than the right reason. They want their children to get ahead in the world by beating their neighbors in the competition for jobs and salaries. There could be no worse reason than this for putting a child through school or college.

Unfortunately, this egregious misconception of the purpose of schooling is not limited to the parents. It is now shared by many educators themselves, and by almost all of the children. The reason given by the schools for offering so wide a variety of vocational courses, the reason given by the parents for insisting upon them, and the reason given by the children for selecting the schools that offer them, is throughout the same misguided notion that the purpose of going to school is earning a good living, not learning to live well.

Nor do you need evidence from me about the progressive relaxation of the standards in our schools and colleges. You know how little home-work your children are now required to do; and if you do not already know it, you can easily discover for yourself that

most high school and college students do not spend forty hours a week studying, in class and out. It would not hurt them at that age if they were to spend forty-eight or fifty-six hours a week at the tasks of learning. Since learning is a liberal, not a servile, pursuit, and since it is the essence of leisure, there is no ground for reducing the time of study to the five-day week and the six-hour workday.

But even those of you who realize how little our children work, and how little is expected of them, may not be cognizant of all the reasons for the relaxation of educational standards. One of them, of course, is the fact that under our present system of extended, compulsory education, the standards must be set so low that no child need be expelled from school for failing to meet them. Nor, with the over-crowding of our classrooms, can any child be held back. They must all be promoted each year to make room for those one year behind them.

But these are not the only reasons for our current educational practices. In the last twenty-five years, the mental hygienists and psychiatrists have come into the picture and made concern about the emotional frustration of the child paramount above all educational considerations.

Children must not be allowed to compete for grades in order to prevent any of them from developing a sense of failure. Children must not be disciplined, for that might also lead to emotional disorders on their part. Above all, children must never be asked to do anything they cannot do easily and painlessly; they must learn effortlessly and with a euphoric sense of success in everything they undertake.

This may not prepare them for all the pains and difficulties, and often the failures, men must reckon with in the strenuous effort to lead the good life; but that does not matter, for the American ideal is not the good life anyway, but having a good time, full of assorted pleasures day after day.

Just as we cannot blame the vocationalism of our schools on the teachers, since we, the parents, are more responsible than they for making our schools nothing but a means to success as measured by money; so we cannot put the whole blame for the relaxation of standards on the psychiatrists. The American people as a whole is responsible for the inverted scale of values which dominates our schools, as it dominates American life. Instead of subordinating play as something which, in addition to being pleasant, serves the useful purpose of refreshing us for the arduous tasks of labor and leisure, we as a people think that work is for the sake of play, and

that leisure is nothing but a round of diversions, amusements, and recreations.

We talk of the pursuit of happiness, which our forefathers understood to be the effort to achieve the highest excellences of which human life is capable; but what we really mean is the pursuit of pleasure. That is mainly what we want to use our wealth for, and that is how we use our free time. In the last fifty years, as the amount of free time has increased progressively with the amazing increase in our productivity, the two things that have followed the same path of accelerated growth are the school system and amusement industries. The growth of the one might conceivably have checked the growth of the other; but it appears to have done the very opposite.

We are not merely devoted to play but we are given to the adoration of childhood, probably because it is that part of human life which is least serious and most playful. Harboring a secret desire to be as carefree as children, we make every effort to see that our children remain as carefree as possible. With such sentiments or dreams about the idyllic world of childhood, we oppose those features of schooling which would make our children grow up more rapidly by suffering the pains and hardships, and having to surmount the difficulties, that are as inseparable from genuine learning as they are from all the other serious business of life itself.

The Achievement of the Last Fifty Years

So far I have pointed only to the dark side of the record. It is reasonable to ask whether that is the whole story. During this half-century in which America has all but accomplished the democratic revolution and made such progress toward the capitalist revolution, have we achieved nothing in the field of education that reflects the great advances which those two revolutions have brought about in our society and in human life?

The answer is that we have succeeded in doing one thing at least, without which all the other things that remain to be achieved could not be accomplished. *We have succeeded in creating all the externals of democratic education.*

It is axiomatic that education must be as universally diffused as citizenship in a political democracy, or as the ownership of capital in a truly capitalist economy. America has in the last fifty years faced up to the practical implications of that axiom. We have applied our genius for mass production to constructing the school buildings, turning out the teachers and administrators, supplying

the transportation, and we have taxed our wealth to pay the rising costs of this mammoth system of public instruction. We have managed thereby to accommodate more and more children in school, and keep them there longer and longer. If the curve of growth continues in the same direction and at the same rate for the next fifty years, there can be little doubt that all the children who should be in school will be housed in class-rooms, that those class-rooms will be staffed by teachers, and that compulsory schooling will be extended to sixteen years, or to what is now the end of college.

From the point of view of bricks and mortar, budgets, recruitment of personnel, and administration, this is an extraordinary achievement, one that far outruns anything the world has even seen. No other country in the world today even remotely approaches having an educational system on this vast scale. But, as I said a moment ago, everything we have so far achieved, and the more we may still achieve along the same lines, represents only the externals of a democratic system of education.

If what goes on within all the school buildings and in all the years of schooling is not the kind of education which should be given future citizens and future men of leisure in our industrial democracy, then it is little better than a vast housing or baby-sitting project. It may keep the children off the streets, keep them from glutting the labor-market, and keep them from getting into worse mischief than they manage to get into in their classrooms or school-yards. The last of these, from what we know about juvenile delinquency, begins to appear somewhat doubtful. But even if our school system succeeded in doing all of these things, that would hardly be a measure of its educational success. On the contrary, it indicates a failure of the most serious kind.

The seriousness of our failure can be assessed from two points of view. One is America's need for scientists, technicians, managers, and leaders. Our schools are failing to produce them in sufficient numbers. We are not turning out enough teachers of mathematics and science to staff our high schools in these subjects. If this has not already become a threat to our national security, it will soon become so.

Quite apart from questions of security, and the most effective operation of an expanding industrial system and military machine, a democracy can prosper only in proportion as its best men are trained for leadership in all walks of public life, and in all the arts and sciences, not just those that affect our industrial potential and our military prowess. It is here that we are most grievously wast-

ing our human resources by failing to push our brightest children to the upper limits of their capacities. We have allowed untold numbers of them to sink into a mental lethargy which keeps them at the level of mediocrity.

The other point of view from which we must assess our failure concerns the average child, and children whose native abilities fall below the average, but not low enough to place them in asylums. These children are human beings. They have enough intelligence, according to our democratic principles, to become our future citizens. In our industrial system, they will all have ample free time to use throughout their adult life. Many of them, we hope, will become capitalists as well as citizens.

But how do we treat these children in school? As if they were destined for a life of freedom, which is essentially a life of leisure and of learning, not of labor and of earning? As if they were destined for the responsibilities of citizenship? As if they were destined for the care and control of their own property?

No. Just the opposite. We treat them as if they were destined to be cogs in the industrial machine, as if they were destined to be slaves rather than free men, as if they were destined to use their free time for fun and frolic rather than for the liberal activities of leisure, as if they were intended not for the pursuit of happiness, but rather to be kept "happy" by bread and circuses—an ever higher standard of living and an ever more variegated round of amusements.

FIRST INDICATION OF THE PROBLEM WE MUST FACE

The two points I have just made constitute the most serious charge I have to make against the American educational system. It amounts to saying that *American schooling is essentially undemocratic or, worse, anti-democratic.* It also indicates the problem which American education has so far failed to face, or has resolutely turned its eyes away from seeing.

Let me explain precisely what I mean be telling you of a proposal which Thomas Jefferson made to the Virginia legislature in 1817. Jefferson, you must remember, was not a democrat. None of our founding fathers was. The end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century was still too early for any man in public life to act on the principles of democracy, and few if any even allowed such principles to enter into their thought. Nevertheless, Jefferson felt that a republic such as ours had some responsibility for the public education of its citizens. Here, then, is what he proposed in 1817.

He proposed that all of the children of Virginia should have three years of common schooling at the public expense. After three years, Jefferson said, let us divide the children into two groups: on the one hand, the few who are destined for leisure and learning, and those he recommended sending to college; on the other hand, the vast majority who are destined for labor, and those, he said, should be immediately apprenticed on the farms or in the shops.

As you can see, Jefferson divided the children into the sheep and the goats—the same division of mankind into the few and the many which was made in all the pre-industrial aristocracies of the past. But Jefferson was in advance of his age when he recommended that even the goats should receive three years of instruction at the public expense. Few if any before him had ever made so revolutionary a suggestion, or one so dangerously verging on the democratic revolution in human affairs.

It should go without saying that Jefferson's proposal was defeated in the Virginia Assembly. His fellow legislators could see no reason why the great mass of the children, who were destined for labor, needed even three years of common, public schooling. Since most of them were not going to be admitted to citizenship and would have almost no free time for liberal pursuits in adult life, any schooling at all would be wasted on them. What they needed to learn in order to do the servile work to which their lives would be devoted, they could learn on the farms and in the shops; and so the sooner they began their apprenticeships there, the better.

In 1957, one hundred and forty years later, we have not advanced beyond Jefferson's undemocratic theory of public education, though that undemocratic theory is now generally approved by our legislatures and put into practice in our schools. Things may look different because we now give all the children 12 or 14 years of public schooling instead of just three; but after the first six years or eight at the most, we still separate the sheep from the goats, and send a few children to the so-called "liberal arts" high schools and colleges, while all the rest are shunted away from any further education and into one form of vocational training or another.

But while Jefferson in 1817, living in the pre-industrial aristocracy which was American then, had some excuse for his undemocratic view of education, we, in 1957, have absolutely no excuse for holding the same view in all essentials. The fact that we do so shows how completely we fail to understand the educational problem of an industrial democracy—a society in which all children are destined for the same mode of life, for citizenship, for labor and the ownership of property, and, above all, for leisure and

learning.

The essence of capitalist democracy is its classlessness—its abolition of the old distinctions between a ruling and subject class, a leisure and a working class, a class of persons having all the dignities of human life and a class of sub-human beings, brutalized and forgotten. In such a society, education must also be classless. It must be essentially the same for all children, and since they are all going to lead the human life of free men and women, it must be liberal for all.

The problem of giving the same quality of liberal schooling to all the children, and beyond that of encouraging all adults to continue liberal learning throughout life, is the problem our society faces for the first time in history, and it is our most serious problem. We do not yet know how to solve it. But we will never begin to do what must be done to solve it, unless we first really accept the problem with all its difficulties and fully recognize its seriousness. That most Americans and most of our educators still refuse to do. You will begin to see why that is the case, as I now proceed to formulate the problem in detail and show you some of the difficulties which must be overcome in solving it. It is more comfortable to avoid facing this problem, and easier to deny that it is a real problem, than it is to try to solve it.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The educational problem we have not yet faced in this country and so have made no effort to solve is forced upon us by the truth of the following proposition: *the same kind of schooling that was given to the few in the pre-industrial aristocracies of the past must now be given to all the children in the industrial, capitalistic democracy of the present and future.*

If the truth of this proposition is not self-evident, it can be made apparent by the following argument.

1. In the pre-industrial aristocracies of the past, only the few who were destined for the free life of the ruling and the leisure class were given schooling.

2. The purpose of that schooling was to prepare them for the uses of their freedom—political activity and the liberal pursuits of leisure.

3. To that end, the schooling was liberal: by disciplining the young in the skills of the liberal arts, and by introducing them to the whole tradition of learning, it initiated them in-

to the life of learning and gave them the means and impetus to continue learning as they engaged in liberal pursuits throughout their adult life.

4. Since the few who were given schooling were destined to , lead the same kind of life after school, the character and content of that schooling was the same for all, not specialized and differentiated.

5. But in our society now, under the just and beneficent conditions of democracy and capitalism, all the children are des- , tined for the free life of the ruling and the leisure class, for all will become citizens with suffrage, and all will have ample time for leisure.

6. We have acknowledged these facts, at least to the extent of giving all the children an equal opportunity to go to school at the public expense. But these facts call for more than taking all the children into our school buildings and keeping them there the same number of years.

7. *If the kind of liberal schooling that was given in the past to the few who were going to be citizens and men of leisure was the right preparation for the responsibilities they would later have to discharge as free men, then, for exactly the same reason, the same kind of liberal schooling must be given to all the children in our democratic society today. Nothing less can or will prepare them to discharge the responsibilities of freedom, which are now the inheritance of all.*

The conclusion is thus seen to rest upon a supposition, introduced by the word “if” in the last step of the foregoing argument. There is, in my judgment, overwhelming evidence for the truth of that supposition. From its truth, the truth of the conclusion inexorably follows, and as soon as we see that, we see the educational problem that our society must face and solve.

Every great truth has its prophet. John Dewey is the prophet of the truth about democratic education. It is not remarkable that we should be able, in 1957, to realize that the democratic revolution which has taken place has profound consequences for education. We have seen the consequences on all sides, most of them bad so far.

John Dewey published *Democracy and Education* in 1916. No one before him had ever put these two words together, and it is re-

markable that he put them together as early as 1916. With prophetic vision he saw, at that early stage in the revolutionary transformation of our society, the emergence of a truly classless society of free men; and, seeing that, he also saw the shape that a truly democratic education must take.

Dewey saw that, for the first time in history, all the children would enjoy the opportunities and privileges, as well as have the burdens and responsibilities, of freedom. Since they would all be able to lead the same kind of human life, he argued that they should all be schooled to lead it well. Therefore, they should all be given the same kind of schooling, and that schooling should be wholly liberal in its purpose, not vocational. Education, he maintained, is growth—the development of a human being in all his capacities. It has no end beyond itself. All growth, he said, is for the sake of more growth; all education, for the sake of more education. Therefore, schooling which is merely the first phase of education, should prepare the child to go on learning—and growing—throughout his life. That is why schooling must be liberal through and through, in the traditional sense of preparing the young for the uses of their freedom.

Dewey condemned vocational training as the very opposite of education for freedom. He referred to it as "the training of animals or slaves." In an industrial democracy, in which all are liable to labor as well as to leisure, schooling must be "liberally vocational" in the sense of giving the young some understanding of the industrial economy in which they would play their part as free men; it must not be "servilely vocational" in the sense of merely training them to perform their function as cogs in the industrial machine. Above all, it must not be directed toward earning a living, but only toward living well.

I do not know how many American educators, who claim to follow Dewey, have read *Democracy and Education*; but, judging from what Dewey's followers have done to American education since 1916, they did not understand the book. They have riddled our schools with the vocationalism that Dewey condemned. They have separated the sheep from the goats by differentiating the students after a few years of common schooling. They have forsaken the fundamental disciplines which Dewey said were indispensable to freedom. And they have done all this in Dewey's name.

Can the Problem Be Avoided?

Instead of asking how they could have departed so far from the truth of Dewey's basic educational principles, let us ask how any-

one can avoid facing the educational problem which a truly democratic theory of education imposes upon us. I can think of only two answers to that question.

The first consists in denying the soundness of the liberal schooling that was given in the past to the few who were destined for citizenship and leisure. If that schooling did not prepare children for the uses of freedom, then, of course, it would be folly to advocate that we should try to give all children today the same kind of schooling because all now will have the freedom that the few had in the past.

But we are stopped from this evasion of the problem by overwhelming evidence to the contrary. The whole of Western civilization, all its arts and sciences, all its institutions, were produced by the few who belonged to the ruling and the leisure class.

Was the schooling bad that prepared a few men to create Greek philosophy and science, that prepared a few men to create the Roman law, that prepared a few men to develop the Christian religion, that prepared a few men to give the modern world the discoveries of experimental science, and its applications in technology and industry. Or, to take one more example nearer home, was the schooling bad which produced the men who wrote the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States, the Federalist Papers, and who created the institutions of our government or administered them in the first fifty years of our national life?

To give anything but a negative answer to these questions is tantamount to saying that the schooling given the few who, in the past, belonged to the ruling and the leisure class, *had absolutely nothing to do with their achievements.* Or, what is even more incredible, it amounts to saying that they were able to do all that they did *in spite of a schooling that gave them no preparation for doing it.*

On the other hand, if we give a negative answer to these questions, we are forced to ask one more question to which the answer is obvious. *Would not the promise of American democracy be more fully realized, and would not the future of American civilization be brighter, if all the children today were given the same kind of schooling that helped our ancestors to create the culture and the institutions we have inherited from them?*

The second, and only other way, of avoiding the educational problem that a truly democratic theory of education imposes upon us consists in recommending that we give democracy up, and with it

our industrial economy, and try to replace them with the pre-industrial and aristocratic conditions of the past. If that could be done, then we might rest content with trying to give liberal schooling to the few, and training all the rest vocationally by apprenticeship to the servile tasks which would consume their life's time.

But anyone in his right mind knows that that cannot be done. Short of a cataclysm, the trend of history cannot be reversed. Returning to pre-industrial methods of production is as impossible as returning to pre-democratic institutions is undesirable. The future belongs to the revolutions that began in the last hundred years.

Unfortunately, that does not make the future inevitably bright. While democracy and capitalism are in themselves intrinsically desirable as providing the conditions of a truly classless society, establishing the conditions of such an ideal society will be a hollow triumph unless the human beings who live under them are able to use them well. Whether or not they can depends entirely on our success in solving the educational problem, and that is why I say it is the most important problem that our society now faces.

Suppose, for example, that you were to take the view that it is impossible to give genuinely liberal schooling to all the children and that it is impossible to expect all men who are citizens and capitalists to use their free time for leisure instead of play—for learning and creative work instead of for diversions and amusements. I would not be surprised if many of you hold this view, because I have found that a shockingly large number of Americans, who claim to be democrats at heart, simply do not have in their hearts the democratic faith that all human beings are capable of liberal education, in school and after.

Without that faith, democracy becomes a travesty, and a society of men who have more free time than they know how to use well becomes a horror.

If all the children are not capable of genuinely liberal schooling, then we are committing political suicide by making them all citizens; for if they cannot be disciplined to think independently and critically, they will be citizens in name only. Actually, they will be political puppets to be pushed around by all the pressures of propaganda. They will be subject to all the influences of demagoguery, which is democracy's worst enemy. It would be better to give democracy up as a misfortune and a delusion than to perpetuate the hypocrisy of universal suffrage unsupported by universal schooling of a genuinely liberal kind.

If all the children are not capable of such schooling, then we can-

not help but degrade them and corrupt our society itself by giving them all so much free time; for if they cannot be given the skills of liberal learning and cannot be persuaded to use their free time for liberal pursuits, then they will not be men of leisure except in name. Actually, they will be a desperate mob of pleasure-seekers, trying one thing after another to kill the time that hangs heavy on their hands. It would be better to destroy the industrial machinery that makes this possible than to promote the horrors of a universal saturnalia.

The Democratic Faith

The democratic faith is ultimately a faith in men, not in institutions. It is a faith in their equality as human beings, in the equal dignity of all as persons, in the capacity of all to be self-governing citizens of a free society, and in the capacity of all to live a human, rather than a sub-human, life by engaging in the liberal pursuits of leisure.

Can anyone who sincerely holds this faith believe, without self-contradiction, that liberal schooling is possible only for the few, and not for all? Can anyone who really understands democracy fail to understand the basic principle of democratic education, which is *equal educational opportunity for all?*

Yet there are many who call themselves democrats who do not understand that basic principle, precisely because their democratic faith is riddled by the contradictory belief that most of the children are incapable of genuinely liberal schooling.

They put a wrong interpretation on the words “equal educational opportunity.” They think we are living up to that ideal when we give all the children an equal opportunity to inhabit our school buildings for the same number of years. They are, therefore, satisfied with the quantitative accomplishments of the American school system in the last fifty years. If they rightly understood the meaning of “equal educational opportunity,” they would suffer agony instead.

The right interpretation is qualitative, not quantitative. Equal educational opportunity means offering all the children the *same kind* of schooling, not just the *same amount of it.* That kind should be the best schooling we can conceive of for the most gifted child.

In a democracy, as Chancellor Hutchins has said, “the best schooling for the best is also the best schooling for all.”

That means giving all the children the opportunity of receiving a genuinely liberal schooling from kindergarten right up to the bachelor's degree—the same kind of schooling that only the most fortunate children received in the past. It means removing every trace of vocational training from the course of study, and making it solid throughout. It means taxing every child to the maximum of his or her capacity. It means trying to make the most and the best out of every human being.

In Defense of the Democratic Faith

When, over the past twenty years, I have drawn these implications of my democratic faith, in lectures on education before large assemblages of teachers or parents, I have had to defend that faith against all kinds of objections raised by those who obviously do not share it.

Where I am dismayed by the spectacle of the undemocratic schooling we have created in this country, they are equally dismayed by the thought of making it democratic—in my understanding of what that means. They have risen to tell me that I must be unacquainted with the facts of life if I suppose that all the children now in our schools can be given the same kind of education—and completely liberal education at that, the best possible.

By the facts of life, they mean the individual differences in intelligence and educational aptitude which are normally distributed around an average from very high to very low. Though I must confess to them that I have never had their class-room experiences in the public schools of our country, I am nevertheless acquainted with the fact that all children are not equally intelligent or equally endowed with other relevant abilities. And I have enough imagination to appreciate the difficulty of giving the same kind of liberal schooling to the most and the least gifted children in our school population.

But these things do not change my mind one bit about either the possibility or the necessity of trying to give all the children the same kind of liberal schooling. For when I interpret equal educational opportunity to mean that we should try to give the best possible education to all the children, regardless of their individual differences in capacity, I am not ignoring those differences. I am not supposing that all the children have the same capacity for acquiring what should be offered equally to all. I am only insisting that each should be helped to acquire as much as his capacity permits, and that what each is helped to acquire, to the utmost of his

capacity, should be the same for all.

Let me explain what I have just said in the following way. Human differences in capacity for education can be thought of in terms of containers of different sizes. Obviously, a half-pint jar cannot take or hold as much liquid as a quart or gallon jar. Now the poorly endowed child is like the half-pint jar, and the gifted child is like the quart or gallon container. Treating them equally does not mean trying to do the impossible, i.e., trying to put a quart or gallon of education into a half-pint container. It means, first of all, trying to fill each container up to the brim. To fill each to its capacity is to treat them equally, yet with full acknowledgement of their unequal capacities.

But more than that is involved in treating them equally. It is possible, for example, to fill them with quite different kinds of liquid. That is what we are doing in our schools right now. Where we should be trying to pour the rich cream of liberal education into all the containers, and right up to the brim, we are half-filling our quart jars with a milk that tries to pass as cream; and into the rest—all the half-pint children—we are ladling the thinnest of skimmed milk or, worse, dirty water. We will not be on the path of democratic education until we discover a way of pouring the richest cream we know how to concoct into all the containers, large and small, each right up to its capacity. Nothing less than that is equal educational opportunity.

When I have said this to teachers, many of whom are themselves in need of cream, their response has been to cry out, once more, that it is impossible, and that I do not know the facts of life. It may be all right, they say, to try pouring cream into the quart or gallon containers; but you simply cannot get a thick liquid like cream into those little half-pint containers. The opening at the top is too small. Cream tends to slop over the sides instead of flowing through it.

My answer is a simple one. *Get a funnel, or invent one.* That is by no means the whole solution of the problem, but it does suggest some of the, approaches we might take toward solving it.

SOME SUGGESTIONS TOWARD THE SOLUTION OF THE PROBLEM

I said at the beginning that no one knows how to solve the educational problem our society must face. The problem is both so novel and so difficult that it would be surprising if we had the solution now, within so short a time since the problem itself first arose. We would be doing well, in my judgment, if we were able to work out

the solution in detail and put it into practice in the next fifty years or more. My complaint about American education is not that it has so far failed to solve the problem, but that it has so far refused to face it squarely; for only with full awareness of its difficulties, will we turn all our wits and energies toward its solution.

The two suggestions I am now about to make do not constitute even partial solutions of the problem. I offer them merely to indicate the kind of thinking that can be evoked by some understanding of the problem.

The first suggestion stems from the idea of using a funnel to get cream through the narrow apertures of small containers. The hint that metaphor contains is that when one tries to treat children of different capacities in the same way so far as the quality of the education is concerned, it may be necessary to administer that education to them in quite different ways according to their different capacities for receiving it.

Let me illustrate what I mean in the following manner, and please remember that this is only an illustration. In my judgment, the substance of liberal education can be described in a way that it makes it *common* to all children, no matter how they differ in capacity. It consists of those things which nourish and exercise the mind, developing its skills and causing it to grow by making it exert itself in performing the most difficult tasks of which it is capable.

Now, for the gifted child, the traditional materials of the liberal arts and the great books function precisely in this way. They are difficult enough to challenge him. They make him reach up and stretch. Precisely because they are over his head, they have the power to help him lift himself up. The harder the books he learns to read, the better he learns to read in general—and to think. Only by reading books he cannot fully understand will his understanding be awakened, and his appetite for understanding more be stimulated.

I am quite willing to admit that these same materials may not work for the less gifted child. If something is too far over the child's head, he cannot get hold of it to stretch and pull himself up. What we must find, then, or failing to find, invent is a set of materials—things to read, subjects to study, and tasks to perform—which are of a difficulty, proportionate to the capacity of the less gifted child, that makes them function for him just as the great books and the traditional subject-matters or tasks of the liberal arts function for the highly gifted child.

The main point of my illustration is missed if you make the mis-

take of identifying the cream of liberal education with the traditional books, subjects, or tasks which once were the substance of liberal schooling when it was given only to the few, and which still constitute, in my judgment, the best materials to use in the case of the more gifted children. The best education for the best becomes the best education for all, not by means of the same materials and methods, but rather by achieving the same effect with all children through using whatever materials and methods produce the same result at different levels of capacity.

We do not at present know what these alternative but functionally equivalents materials and methods are for giving the same quality of liberal education and obtaining the same result at all the levels of capacity to be found in the school population. Nor are we at present trying to find them or devise them; because American educators and teachers have not yet recognized the task the schools must perform in an industrial democracy. Until the educational profession as a whole comes to understand the true meaning of equal educational opportunity, there is little likelihood that much will be done in this direction.

My second suggestion is like the foregoing one in that it, too, involves administering the same quality of education differently to children of different capacities. It occurred to me in the following manner.

A few years ago I was lecturing about education at a state college, and trying to make clear the central problem we have to solve. After the lecture, I dined with some of the teachers, and one of them, whom I had known before, told me how much she was troubled by my talk. She said that, before hearing it, she would have regarded herself as a democrat and firm in her democratic faith. But if that faith implied equal educational opportunity in the sense in which I meant it, then she had better confess at once that she was ready to give democracy up.

I asked her why she felt this way. She told me that she had been assigned by the president of the institution to teach a class in remedial English at the junior college level. She had been teaching it for six months at the time of our conversation; and thus far she had not been able to teach the children in that class the rudiments of English. They still did not know how to write an English sentence well. They could not learn to punctuate. They could barely read. Well, she said, if she could not succeed in teaching these children the rudiments of English how preposterous it was to suppose that they, and many other children like them, were capable of liberal schooling up to the bachelor’s degree.

I must confess that she had me stumped at first. I knew she was reporting the facts without exaggeration. I knew that she was a good teacher and could succeed if it were at all possible. Providentially, it occurred to me to ask her the one question that could bring our conversation to a more hopeful conclusion. I asked her how many students she had in this remedial English class, and how many hours a week she had them. She told me she had forty-five students and had them for only three hours a week. With these facts before me, I then had one more question to ask, and her answer to that question suggested another step we will probably have to take to solve the problem of democratic education.

My final question to her was: "Supposing that you could devote all your time and energy to the "most irremediable" student in your class, supposing that you could for a while have all that student's time and attention, do you then think that you would be able to teach that student how to write and read?" Her answer was immediate and affirmative. "Of course, I could," she said. And of course she could, for no normal child is unteachable if given individual care and help, and all the time that is needed for the task. There are subnormal children and emotionally disturbed children, but they need the care of asylums or psychiatrists, not schools and teachers. So far as the normal school population is concerned, there is no unteachable child, though children of different abilities may need different amounts of time and attention on the part of their teachers.

What this suggests is that, to administer the same quality of liberal education to all the children in our schools, it may be necessary to give the less gifted children much more teacher-time and individual attention than is now given any child. We might be able to do this by giving the more gifted children less teacher-time and individual attention; and they might profit by having less help, just as the others might profit by having more.

In any case, one thing is clear. Liberal schooling cannot be administered to all the children when the teachers in our public schools have thirty-five or more in a class. My own guess is that a ratio of fifteen students to one teacher is the maximum for even a modicum of success in teaching; and that teaching can be more effectively done only when the number of students is considerably less than that.

This means that we probably need many more teachers than we have at present, in spite of the fact that at present the teacher shortage is acute. It means also that the cost of public education may

very well have to be four or five times greater than it is now. It means that we may have to learn how to distribute teacher-time to better advantage, and how to use the abilities of different teachers in different ways, by applying to class-room teaching some of the techniques which television and films make possible. It means, finally, that we may have to enlist older students in the teaching of younger ones, and persuade parents that they, too, have to engage in teaching.

The ultimate truth may be that a democratic society cannot solve its educational problem unless every member of it takes on some of the burden of teaching others. By doing so, every one would also be engaged in learning, for there is no better way to learn than by teaching.

THE MAGNITUDE OF THE PROBLEM

How to administer the same quality of liberal schooling to all the children is by itself a problem of staggering proportions. But it is only half of the problem of education which a democratic society must solve.

The other half concerns the more important phase of education, which begins when school is left behind, and the individual is responsible for the cultivation of his own mind. You will recall what I said on this aspect of the problem earlier. In all the pre-industrial aristocracies of the past, the truly educated men were those who, in addition to having been well schooled, made learning one of the chief pursuits of their adult leisure.

There is no other way of becoming educated. No one can get an education in school; for youth itself is the insuperable obstacle to getting it in school. While the child may be more trainable than a mature man or woman, the mature person is much more educable. The immature—all those who are still in school and college—lack the experience, the seriousness, the stability, the personal responsibility that are indispensable to learning the fundamental things that everyone should ultimately come to know.

The immature mind is too shallow a soil for ideas to take root in. It is only after years of experience tempered by suffering the hardships of life that human beings can really begin to grasp fundamental ideas and to think soundly and seriously about fundamental issues. It is only in adult life that certain subjects become intelligible.

The consequences of this fundamental truth are twofold. On the one hand, when we realize that liberal education cannot be com-

pleted in school, we can make a proper, and more modest, estimate of what should be accomplished there. This may help us to succeed in doing what is possible for the young, instead of failing as we must if we expect to torn out educated men and women. All that the whole school system, from kindergarten through college, should try to do is to give every child the skills of learning, some acquaintance with the fields of learning, and an enduring incentive to go on learning throughout the rest of his life. If our institutions did that for every child, they would have done all that is educationally possible at the level of schooling. On the other hand, when we realize that liberal learning must be carried on throughout each individual life, as one of the main pursuits of leisure, we can begin to estimate the full magnitude of the educational problem that our society must cope with for the first time in the history of mankind.

Compulsory adult education is a contradiction in terms, since anyone who is an adult should be responsible for his own continuing education and should engage in it voluntarily. Nevertheless, our society as a whole must do everything it can to provide the conditions favorable to adult learning, and to foster the occasions or circumstances that facilitate it; and it must do this not only through the agencies of government and by the use of public funds, but also by the cooperation of business corporations, labor unions, churches, universities, and by the use of private funds made available for this purpose by charitable trusts.

May I say here, in passing, that the seminars and lectures which the Industrial Indemnity Company of San Francisco is now making available to its employees, their families, and their friends, is an example of what should be done in every company and every community in this land. This should not be confused with educational expedients to make junior executives more useful to their companies in the future. The end in view must be truly liberal, not utilitarian or pragmatic. The undertaking should be motivated by the concern of every one involved with the fullest personal development of which these human beings are capable.

CONCLUSION

With some sense of the problem and of its magnitude, I think you can now see why it is the most serious and difficult of all the problems which confront our society as it moves forward into the future.

Unless we solve it, all the good that is implicit in the democratic and capitalist revolutions will come to naught. Worse than failing to bear the fruit they promise, they may sow the seeds of destruc-

tion within the very framework of our society. Institutions which are planned to benefit men work in the opposite way when the men who must operate them are not themselves up to the task. Without a liberally schooled and a liberally educated people, democracy and capitalism must degenerate into a mockery of themselves.

The problem of education is serious enough and overwhelming in its magnitude right now. But it will become more serious and more staggering in the next fifty years, if automation develops as predicted and if the capitalist revolution completes what the democratic revolution has begun in the creation of a free society. With every man a capitalist as well as a citizen, and with the average amount of time required for toil reduced to a small portion of a human life, nothing except education at its best can save the sanity of our society. Nothing else can make universal citizenship and universal leisure a blessing rather than a curse. The misuse of the free time and the misuse of the political power which all men will then possess will set loose a more destructive force within our society than can threaten us from without.

However difficult it may be, the problem can be solved—on two conditions. We must have the democratic faith that all children can be liberally schooled and all men can become liberally educated, because all of them, as rational, are born with a desire to know and are destined for freedom. And we must combine that democratic faith with the understanding that happiness is to be pursued, not through having a good time, nor through acquiring money, fame, and power, but through doing one's duty, acting virtuously, and seeking wisdom. 🕮

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