

The Time Has Come

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE TEACHERS OF MANKIND

By Ralph Borsodi

(Concluded from the April-May issue)

THE TIME has come, as I said in the last issue in this article, when the leadership which the warrior lost to the priest, the priest to the merchant, the merchant to the banker, and which the banker is now losing to the public official, must be taken over by the teacher. A new world must be built. And the castle-centered, church-centered, bank-centered, government-centered community must be replaced by a school-centered and university-centered society. We teachers are false to the responsibilities of our difficult profession if we trust the leaders of the United Nations—*after the war is won*—to write a peace treaty for the world.

It is necessary not only to make it clear that there are sound reasons for taking each of the three steps proposed immediately upon the ending of the war, but that each step is interdependent and that all must be taken in order to achieve the high objective toward which they are directed. Without going into details, it becomes self-evident that nothing much less complete and radical will actually resolve the following world problems:

The problem of peace and security. Since no nation and no party, other than the World Military Police, will be permitted by the police to acquire the armaments necessary to war or violent revolution, wars will be virtually impossible.

The problem of tyranny and liberty. Without requiring any nation to abandon its present form of government or preventing it from establishing even a monarchical or theocratic form of government, and without compelling all nations to adopt a form of government vaguely referred to as "democratic" in order to insure freedom from tyranny, the combination of military disarmament with universal free trade, free travel and free communication will render the destruction of liberty and the maintenance of tyranny impossible.

The problem of imperialism. Since colonial governments will be prevented from using imperial armies for the purpose of maintaining their rule, no governments which do not rule with the consent of the governed can survive.

The problem of immigration. Since each nation will remain free to determine for itself permanent membership and residence of aliens, mass-immigration which might threaten the native culture or standards of living, can be prevented.

The problem of progress. Since the World Police will only be concerned with the maintenance of peace, the existing social, economic, political and religious institu-

tions of the various nations of the world will not be "frozen" in their present forms; and may be changed by the people of any nation by any means other than the use of force.

The problem of winning this war and making it possible to establish such a peace. An immediate declaration of such war aims would dampen the ardor of the peoples of the Axis nations; it would enlist the sympathy and even co-operation of some part of their populations in the war effort of the United Nations; it would enormously improve the morale of the United Nations; it would constitute a political offensive of incalculable value against the Hitlerized nations of the world.

These minima will, of course, be decried as impractical and inexpedient by those who pride themselves on being politic and practical. But they are nonetheless useful. For if nothing less can insure permanent peace, they become touchstones by which to judge how long the truce our political peace-makers are planning, will last.

Can the United Nations be compelled to declare their war aims now? My answer is, yes, they can be compelled to do so by the simple process of having teachers call all men and women whose profession is concerned with influencing their fellow men to meet in Schools, Colleges, Universities and other Institutions of Learning; there and then to formulate the essentials of such a declaration of war aims. It is the literal truth that at this time the people of the United Nations are without adequate leadership on these fundamental matters. They long ago lost their faith in leadership by great captains of industry. They are fast losing their faith in political leadership. The time is ripe for the teachers of mankind to furnish such leadership. If in addition to formulating the essentials of peace, our teachers were to organize themselves into regional, national and international councils for the purpose of formulating a new world order, they could take over the leadership of mankind, and take the place in society which is rightly theirs.

TOWARD A REALLY NEW ORDER

The truth and validity of every plan for a new order must be tested by the manner in which it deals with the problems of peace, prosperity, politics and progress. I have already referred to what I think are the immediate essentials of a permanent peace. But it should be recognized that these essentials listed deal only with an outer peace—the control of *mass-violence*. They do not deal

with domestic political problems, nor with the problems involved in the achievement of that inner peace, individual by individual and family by family. Nor do these proposals deal directly with the problems of prosperity and progress: they deal with them only indirectly by creating conditions in which progress and prosperity become possible. In such a letter as this, it is obviously impossible to discuss such problems in detail. But it is necessary to discuss the relative merits of the only two basic alternative principles between which we must choose.

All the activities and institutions of mankind—social, economic, political and religious—may be pursued and organized upon either of two principles: the principle of centralizing power in the hands of one man or a small number of persons; or the principle of decentralizing, diffusing or distributing power among the people generally.

I recognize that cogent reasons can be adduced for centralization, particularly for the purpose of dealing with great emergencies and catastrophes such as war. But undeniable is the lesson of history: centralization should never be resorted to by mankind if any alternative method can be developed for attaining the purpose in view. "All power corrupts," said Lord Acton after a lifetime devoted to the study of history, "and absolute power corrupts absolutely." In spite of the fact that centralization appeals on practical grounds to financiers, industrial engineers, and trade unionists—and on idealistic grounds to other men—Communists, for instance—I believe we should reject centralization, except for the very limited number of large-scale activities in which decentralization is manifestly impossible.

The real problem of the social order then becomes one of restricting centralization to those activities and those institutions where it properly belongs, and of decentralizing every activity and every institution which would promote the welfare of individual human beings. The earth is a heritage, entrusted to this generation, to be conserved for our children and our children's children. It is ours to enrich and enjoy. It is not ours to ravish and destroy.

In a world that seems to me over-centralized, the principle to apply to the problems of inner peace, progress, prosperity and politics, is decentralization. Unless we begin our program with a solution of the problem of living for the individual, the family, and the local community, it is ridiculous to assume that we shall be able to solve those of not only a whole nation but of the whole world.

DOES NOT DEPEND UPON THE STATE

One of the great advantages of decentralization is that it need not wait upon national legislation.

Even here in America in spite of the war it is possible to move toward a world order which decentralizes itself family by family, community by community, and even industry by industry. Decentralization is essentially an educational movement. At heart, it is a new approach to the problem of how modern man should live. In essence it is an attitude, not a formula. Its practical execution can begin with a return to the land—movement of people, even family by family, from urban centers to homesteads out in the country. Stated in this way it seems simple, but one of its implications makes it the greatest challenge to education in all history.

For over a century, the people of all the industrial nations of the world have been taught the only things necessary to a high standard of living—which we have assumed to be synonymous with a good way of life—is urban employment, life in an urban apartment, money with which to shop in urban stores, and plenty of leisure time to spend in pursuit of urban amusements. Even children who have come to us in our schools, colleges and universities from country homes have been infected with the shoddy, materialistic values which dominate the modern world. To obtain these things, we train them for professions which aim at making money rather than enriching life. The native values of rural life which the wisest men and the greatest prophets have spoken, is something which modern urban life have forgotten. Yet meditation upon the proper relationship of man to the earth inevitably leads to the conclusion that the great teachers of old time were right, and that the problems with which modern man is confronted are the natural consequences of his mistaken approach to the problem of how to live.

The task of teaching people how to use modern technology properly, and organizing society around industry, but around the hearth, the farm, and the homestead is no simple task. It requires that we re-educate ourselves, and then to teach men and women they should use power and machinery and modern science in the home, on the farm, in community shops and factories, and in the limited number of big industrial centers needed to produce the things which cannot be manufactured economically by the people for themselves. This is a task in which we, who have devoted ourselves to education should lead. This is a task for Universities, Colleges, Schools.

The first aim of the teacher should, not be to educate men in those liberal arts which discipline the mind and thus free the spirit, but even difficult to do this first thing without at the same time teaching men how they can live so that their families can produce a decent living.

themselves. The last thing which we need to teach them is what unfortunately we have come to teach them first—how to make money. If we are to avoid peopling the world with robots, who have no personal control over their lives and their communities, and who are entirely dependent upon distant, absentee management, then we must teach them how they can be economically independent (at least for the necessities of life). The free man is not merely the man who has that infinitesimal fraction of the political power represented by a vote. It is the man who is so independent that he can deal with all men and all institutions, even the State, on terms of equality.

It is an abdication of the responsibility which we assumed when we joined the ranks of teachers, to leave this question to the public officials of the nation, or to business men concerned with creating wants for the goods and services they wish to manufacture and sell. It is treason at this critical time to leave to others the question that millions of demobilized and jobless soldiers and post war-workers will ask as soon as the violence ends. The men who are making the sacrifices now in order to free this green earth from a new kind of slavery, are entitled not to jobs, not to pensions, not to bonuses, not to relief, but to a share of that fair green earth. The returning American soldier can ask for nothing more truly American than the opportunity to produce a living for a family on land to which he holds title himself. Let us teach them how to acquire land, how to build homes, how to cultivate the earth, and how to make in their own kitchens and shops with modern tools and methods the essentials of a good way of life. How to earn the money with which to buy the luxuries and amusements of urban life, will not be rendered impossible by such an education, though it will be less important. For the rank and file of men, life on such a new American homestead—where they work first to produce their own needs—will solve not only the problem of security, but will also increase the wherewithal for the luxuries of modern life.

The political and institutional changes needed to implement such a new order will follow and accompany such a movement of education. Man becomes what he has been taught, and not only he himself, but the institutions amidst which he lives, ultimately reflect what he has come to believe. The time has come for us to cease training men to fit into a scheme of things designed by politicians, by advertising men, or even by industrial engineers. The time has come to teach them how to live a normal life out of the texts entrusted to us, containing as they do the accumulated knowledge and wisdom of the great men of all time.

Slowly, through the sacrifice of countless lives and immeasurable suffering; slowly, from the destruction of millions in ships, munitions and other materials of war, we are learning from ruthless enemies how to win this war. In spite of our unpreparedness, we are accumulating the knowledge and the means for offensive action. It may be soon, and it may be years from now, but eventually we must win. We cannot live in the sort of world which would be imposed upon us if the gangsterism of the Axis nations should triumph.

It is late, very late, as mankind slips back from one barbarity to another. But no matter how late, nor how difficult it may be for truth and wisdom to make itself heard amid the floods of propaganda, there is no reason for shrinking from the effort. It has been well said that this is the time for greatness. I cannot believe that the teachers entrusted with the great heritage of mankind's learning, have nothing fundamental to contribute to guide mankind in this period of travail. This faith, and no self-assured certainty that what I have here suggested is the final truth, has led me to write this letter.

Why should not all of us whose work is that of influencing our fellow men, meet in the Halls of Learning and, guided by the greatest men of all time, take counsel together; and so take a first step toward making the University, the College and School the center of that more perfect world toward which everyone who considers himself a teacher is fated to struggle?

A perfect world we cannot make, but surely we can design a better one than the one in which we now find ourselves, and surely we can devise a more perfect plan than the one which politicians will want to make for us.

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