

SAFEGUARDING DEMOCRACY THROUGH ADULT CIVIC EDUCATION

By J. W. STUDEBAKER, U. S. Commissioner of Education

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New Publication

To meet the demand for information about public affairs forums in the United States, the Office of Education has issued a new publication—

Education for Democracy—Public Affairs Forums Bulletin 1935 No. 17, price 10 cents

Written by J. W. Studebaker, U. S. Commissioner of Education, and C. S. Williams, Assistant Administrator of the Forum Project being sponsored by the Office of Education, this first Government bulletin on forums discusses in

Chapter I—Building for Civic Intelligence

Chapter II—Community-Wide Forums at Des Moines

Chapter III—The General Forum Movement

Chapter IV—Techniques for Forum Management.

Chapter V—A National-Wide Program of Forums

*Order from the Superintendent of Documents,
Washington, D. C.*

Bibliography

Good References on Discussion Meetings, Open Forums, Panels, and Conferences. Bibliography No. 30. Compiled by Martha R. McCabe, Assistant Librarian of the Office of Education. Subjects included: Values and techniques of discussion groups, open forums, panels, conferences, discussion techniques in the schools. Copies free from the Office of Education, Department of the Interior, Washington, D. C.

FOREWORD

This bulletin is a compilation of a few recent addresses and papers presented by the United States Commissioner of Education. The material pertains particularly to the public affairs forum movement. The publication is issued in order to further meet the many requests for information in this field.

Included in this bulletin are the following addresses and papers:

Does Our Educational System Need Reorganizing?

Education for Democracy.

Making America Safe for Democracy.

1. The Revolution to End Revolution.
2. The Inverted Educational Pyramid.
3. The Des Moines Plan for Adult Civic Education.
4. The Protected Freedom to Learn.
5. A Nation-Wide System of Public Affairs Forums.

EDITOR

DOES OUR EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM NEED REORGANIZING?'

Most of us are convinced that our depression-ridden, war-threatened world needs *some* drastic reorganization. We have had ample opportunity to experience the horrors of war and the desolations of a world-wide economic depression during the past two decades. The struggle against suicidal war and revolution-breeding economic chaos is the main event for our century. Practically nothing can be considered apart from this struggle. For, if we fail to solve the war problem and the economic problem, our civilization will go down in a whirlpool of chaos and violence, carrying with it the institutions of light and learning.

This is no time, if there ever was one, to stand aloof from world problems in the rarefied atmosphere of pedagogy, as if we educators might play our part simply by teaching the accepted scientific facts such as the multiplication table and the undisputed revelations of history. The social issues now before the educational world *must* not be and *cannot* be pushed into the background by pretending that problems concerned with teaching methods, administration, and school organization, for the kind of educational system we now have, are of paramount significance to educators.

First things must be put first if second things in importance are to be put anywhere in the future. For, what shall it benefit us to perfect our educational system so that youth leaves our institutions of learning, prepared to the hilt to

' Address for the New York Town Hall of the Air, NBC Network, New York, N. Y., Feb. 6, 1936.

do something fine in the world, if the great mass of these trained young people can find nothing to do and are finally sent to fertilize the battlefields of a new war?

So, when we ask ourselves the question, "Does our educational system need reorganizing?" we must preface the answer by raising and dealing with the question, "Reorganizing for what purpose, to what end?"

The world has experienced a great deal of reorganization of public education since 1914. In some countries that reorganization was for the purpose of developing centralized agencies for indoctrinating the mass of people with beliefs in the principles or nostrums of political and economic dictatorships. The leaders in those countries are realists in that they understand the absolute necessity of organizing education according to the patterns of their regimes *to the end that it shall contribute to the despotic social organization they are creating.* Having smashed all other democratic institutions, free speech, free press, and free assemblage, they had to end once and for all the old system of public education which to some extent had promoted freedom of inquiry.

Now, that is one kind of reorganization of education. I am frank to say that I do not think we need *that* kind. In fact, most Americans are still ready to put up a pretty strenuous fight to keep our country from reaching that stage where the people feel so helpless that they are ready to permit some "Sawdust Caesar" to reorganize things along the lines of the totalitarian state.

There are some people who believe that the teaching profession should decide upon the correct answers to the problems of our social order, and then unitedly work to indoctrinate youth with those answers. These people would reorganize our system of public education to the end of training for what is called "a new social order." They tell us that teachers and professors must take a stand on the vital issues which confront contemporary civilization and try to secure acceptance of the predetermined solutions.

There is a second school of thought on this matter, similar in many respects to the "new social order" school. The people of this persuasion want the schools to be used to indoctrinate youth with unquestioning belief in the status quo, for which they have many terms, such as: "The American system" and "capitalistic democracy", coined to make it appear sacrilegious to consider objectively certain social or economic ideas.

Both of these groups, it seems to me, would like to treat the debatable as if it were undebatable. Personally, I do not like either of these purposes for reorganizing education. Neither is consistent with the process of democracy.

The end result of any changes or improvements in our educational system should be a more successful democracy—more successful in enabling our people to accomplish the aims set forth in the Preamble to the American Constitution.

To me, there is nothing more important than the planning of facilities of public education for youth and adults so that all citizens shall have access to a clear understanding of the vital social, political, and economic alternatives from which they may choose in deciding the future of our democratic society.

To the extent that public education has failed to bring youth and adults to grips with the great issues of our time, it has failed to serve the cause of democracy. To the extent that our educational system has failed the cause of democracy, it needs reorganizing.

Now, it must be obvious that our educational system has not thus far provided sufficient opportunities for the masses of people to achieve an understanding of their social problems through free discussion, guided study, and public debate. We must admit that, instead of boldly promoting vitalized study and discussion of current controversial issues in secondary schools, in many places there has been a disposition to avoid them. For various reasons it has been considered safer to keep youth busy with a study of the technical forms of government than with a study of the current problems which involve the social welfare.

While this policy may be safer for school administrations which like to see things running smoothly with the least of controversy, the side-stepping of vital social and economic problems is decidedly dangerous to the welfare of American democracy.

But I am afraid that our complicated problems will not wait until we can raise up a new generation, trained especially in the critical approach to public questions. In fact, it seems very clear to me that our society has now moved into the stage of its development where civic education in elementary and secondary schools, even for children of the masses, will not be sufficient. At best, formal education through the age of 17 or 18 can provide only a foundation for the essential superstructure of *adult* civic education. In a democracy that tries to operate in the midst of social complexity, our educational institutions must always be in the process of reorganization, of reorientation, of readjustment. I think that the greatest emphasis *now* should be placed on improved organization for *adult* civic education. I think this, first, because it is of great importance that those who *now* vote should have access to systematic and free discussion of the problems with which they must deal; and, second, because once the adults of our communities have competently managed discussion for themselves, they will want it and will work to get it for their children.

Having said that I do think we need some reorganizing of our educational system for the purpose of vitalizing popular government and democratic social organization, let me go on to suggest in bare outline what this reorganization might involve:

1. By reorganization I do not mean that we should set up new or parallel agencies. We may need to work out some new administrative units for the efficient operation of adult civic education as well as for increasing and broadening educational opportunities for children and adolescents. But so far as the public sponsorship of education is concerned, the existing agencies should be improved and vitalized. I want it definitely understood that I think the principle of local

control should *not* be minimized by federalizing or centralizing the management or control of our educational system.

2. It is my conviction, from 20 years of experience as a school administrator, that public affairs forums promoted and managed by the local education authorities on a community-wide basis, rural and urban, offer us a practical point of departure in organizing education for an enduring and better democracy. When I say this I do not in any sense depreciate the great importance of vocational education, regular night-school classes, and university extension courses. I merely recognize the fact that fewer than a million of our 75,000,000 adults are so engaged in special study. This scant provision for adult learning is not enough to provide self-government with the strong educational base it requires. Nor is this existing system sufficiently concerned with social problems or geared to the real needs of our democracy for informed citizenship.

The masses of people of all classes are now becoming more and more interested in the social issues which affect their daily lives. These people can be tied into an educational process, if our educational system is so organized as to permit the masses to go into the schoolhouses and other convenient meeting places in all the communities of the Nation, and there, with the help of capable forum leaders, carry forward a free and many-sided discussion of public affairs.

3. This year the United States Office of Education has the opportunity of promoting a small beginning toward what I believe must eventually become a carefully planned, Nation-wide system of public forums. Ten public forum demonstration centers in 10 different States will attempt community-wide programs of adult civic education, with financial assistance from Federal relief funds. These programs will be similar to the one which has been operated in Des Moines, Iowa, during recent years. They will employ numerous unemployed teachers, librarians, and others in the program. The forum leaders will be highly trained and specialized persons, capable of giving high-caliber leader-

ship to the projects. While Federal funds will be used to establish these demonstration centers, local responsibility and control will be scrupulously observed in the selection of personnel and the determination of the subjects to be discussed. Through publications and in other ways the people of the Nation will be informed about the organization, operation, and results of these "experiment stations" for democracy.

The forum method, properly managed, is basically educational and fundamentally democratic. It develops the willingness to give and take, to exchange opinions and share information, to respect the rights of others in the expression of honest beliefs. The forum technique, when widely practiced, is an antitoxin against the disease germs of an authoritarian dogmatism.

The basic assumption of the public forum is that truth is not the monopoly of any individual, class, or group, but rather the result of a cooperative search and a continuous process of public sharing. As President Wilson so well put it: "The whole purpose of democracy is that we may hold counsel with one another, so as not to depend upon the understanding of one man, but to depend upon the counsel of all."

I have said that I believe our educational system does need some reorganization and much improvement. I have tried to emphasize, however, the great importance of being crystal clear on the purpose for which we need this reorganization.

Anyone who has studied the development of dictatorships must be impressed with the tactics which are employed with respect to education. As issues become sharper, as the community becomes more divided, and as minorities become more fanatical, every sort of pressure is exerted to control the learning process, to intimidate teachers, and to stop discussion. *This thing must not happen in America.* If we are to prevent it, we must act now in practical ways to revitalize our educational system. The way to do this is

to promote free speech and free assemblage as an *educational* process.

If we believe in democracy, if we believe in the truly American way, then we believe that *the solution of our great social and economic problems rests with the people.*

Our obligation as educators is to keep open the lines of communication and to promote the free and systematic use of every medium of expression to the end that the American people may act in the determination of their future with understanding and intelligence.

EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY¹

Those who framed the Declaration of Independence used the following words to describe the purpose of their struggle for self-government, "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." The student who reads through the literature of that era discovers that it was the firm conviction of the advocates of free self-government that if the arbitrary controls of self-appointed authority were removed, "the pursuit of happiness" would be possible, and would result in the achievement of happiness for the vast majority. As we are aware, people in some parts of the world have returned the controls over "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" to arbitrary authority. I think they did this partly because they were not having much success in catching happiness for themselves through at least a semblance of the democratic pursuit of it. For the purpose of my remarks, it is not particularly pertinent to inquire whether the dictators are delivering the promised happiness. If declining standards of living, crushing military budgets, and growing threats of bankruptcy are any indication, we have a right to be skeptical.

But I am interested at the moment in the reason why people in the modern world in a period of crisis tend to discard the rights of democracy for the authority of dictatorship. There is no one reason which seems to explain it. To some extent, the collapse of parliamentary democracy has been facilitated by the use of new methods of propaganda

¹ Address before the Department of Superintendence, National Education Association, St. Louis, Mo., Feb. 24, 1936.

... and most important considerations...
... and social conditions of the time

and cleverly manipulated appeals to mass emotions by experts in crowd psychology. Another contributing influence is the skillful employment by certain leaders of the technique of conspiracy learned during the World War. Another reason for the almost supine acceptance of absolute authority by people somewhat familiar with the freedom of democracy is traceable to the psychology necessarily inculcated in the masses of people during war which makes them dependent upon orders and fails to promote the self-reliance and self-discipline necessary for self-government. Then, too, in each case there are special factors contributing to the downfall of democracy.

To complete the list of causes would be difficult and tedious. I wish to suggest here one important underlying cause for what appears to be the disintegration of democratic social organization. It is this: The educational base for democratic action in certain countries was exceedingly inadequate.

You will note that in the countries where democracy is most virile and the possibility of success for dictatorship is most remote—countries like Sweden and Denmark—the educational base is both broad and vital. This education is not merely vocational or cultural. It is concerned with “the pursuit of happiness” through democratic processes. Such educational programs are founded upon the proposition that democratic action must come from mass understanding of the problems the people face as citizens.

In the countries which have moved from democracy into dictatorship, there was no such broad educational base for democracy as we find in Sweden today. In some cases, the leaders of the democratic order permitted the old system of education which had been devised under monarchical regimes to continue to function without substantial change. But the dictators who followed them were more realistic. They were quick to understand how vital it is to control the educational process in the interest of a given social organization. They wanted obedience, unquestioning respect for their authority, ignorance of ideas contrary to their own,

and uniform agreement with their policies. They used the educational system to indoctrinate youth with their ideas and to train up faithful followers. As a substitute for what we generally think of as adult education, they stage huge mass demonstrations. For they are conscious of the importance of indoctrinating the masses with the slogans and prejudices necessary to sustain the dictatorship in power.

More important than terror and violence is the control of the means of communication and even of the details of the educational process. Teachers and professors who could not be persuaded to indoctrinate in accordance with the desires of the dictatorship, were summarily removed and the most trusted disciples of the regime were given the responsibility of managing education. Whatever else may be said of modern dictators, it must be conceded that they see clearly the relation of education to social organization. They have with all haste and thoroughness organized education to make a major contribution to the authoritarian state. They have organized education on the assumption that the dictator should direct the "pursuit of happiness" and that the people should be trained to follow the directions.

The assumption in *democracy* is that the people shall be free to direct that "pursuit of happiness" for themselves. If the democratic social organization through which that great human pursuit of well-being is carried forward fails to provide an educational base broad enough and vital enough to assure reasonably intelligent social action so that the masses actually capture a fair degree of happiness for all, democracy cannot survive. Democracy more than any other form of social organization requires a mass educational system for its perpetuation. Not only that, but it also requires an educational process which fits the social organization and contributes to its stability and growth.

Here, I think, we must make a careful distinction between education for democracy and education under dictatorship. Please note that my compliment to the dictators for their realism in recognizing the essential connection between the educational process and social organization was a back-

handed compliment. I need not say that I do not like their social organization, and that therefore I wish they were not quite so realistic in making an educational bulwark for it. But I must emphasize that if we have the same degree of realism with respect to our social organization which we call democracy, we will build our educational bulwark in accordance with the principles of that social organization. In addition, we will resist every attempt of dominant or minority factions to divert our educational system from those principles.

While the technique of planned and persistent indoctrination is a good one for the social organization of dictatorship, its widespread use is fatal to democracy. Indoctrination is the natural outgrowth of dictatorship. It contributes to the stability of that type of social organization. The educational system which employs the technique of indoctrination has an authoritarian point of reference in the dictatorship. The point of view to be indoctrinated is certified by the leaders of the totalitarian state. The object of indoctrination in this case is to induce people to hold the prescribed opinions and thus become satisfactory citizens (or whatever human beings may be called under such circumstances).

But, when the process of indoctrination is applied in a democracy, it has no legitimate point of reference in the social organization itself. Its point of reference must be some faction within the democratic social organization. That is to say, the system of education becomes the propaganda agency of some faction. When this happens the educational process not only fails to contribute to the social organization which created it, but it becomes the arch enemy of that social organization and contributes to its early dissolution.

The social organization we call democracy is based upon two important principles: First, that the majority shall determine the policy with respect to any given issue at any given time; second, *that the right of the minority to attempt to become the majority through the use of free speech, free press, and free assemblage shall be assured.* The educational

system cannot be used to indoctrinate the learners with respect to the social, economic, and political issues upon which there is a difference of opinion, without either violating the democratic rights of the minority by acting as the instrument of a majority faction or violating the rights to the majority by acting as a propaganda agency of a minority faction. In other words, indoctrination and democracy are incompatible. It makes little difference whether the process of indoctrination is used to induce learners to adopt minority or majority positions. It is more likely, of course, that if public education is used as an instrument of indoctrination, the dominant factions in our society will dictate the process. For this reason, we must be especially alert in our teaching to avoid being used as propaganda tools by majority groups either directly or indirectly.

Organized education must have a point of reference. Ours is democratic self-government. I think we should analyze our education process critically and frequently to see whether it is actually functioning efficiently as a bulwark of democracy. This is more important to my mind than our more usual inquiries concerning overcrowded classrooms, efficient budget organization, and many other problems of school management, none of which should be neglected.

Some may wonder whether I am not suggesting here that we indoctrinate for democracy. Let us see what it would mean to the learning process if we attempted to do that. It would mean that we would arrange the learning process so that the learners would never read books or hear lectures by persons advocating some other form of social organization. All criticisms of the workings of democracy would be scrupulously kept from the eyes and ears of the learners. I do not suggest either of these restrictions. As a matter of fact, to interfere with the right of learners to study and understand types of social organization contrary to democracy, in the hope that the learners' ignorance of other forms of government will somehow prevent them from deserting democracy, is inconsistent with the very essence of the democratic concept.

This reasoning leads us to what appears to be a paradox. If a majority of people should want to discard democracy by using the established democratic processes, and were blocked in their effort by a minority tyranny of some sort, this would mean abandoning majority rule to secure majority purposes. No, we maintain democracy only by majority consent. And we maintain the right of minorities even when some of them wish to advocate an opposition to the very democracy which gives them the right of free speech and assembly. Either we have democracy by majority consent and with minority protection or we have *something* that is *not* democracy.

I do not consider it correct, then, to assume that, because I believe we must organize education as a bulwark of democracy, I am therefore accepting the principles and processes of indoctrination as the method. Isn't it really a nonsensical contradiction of terms to say that one who promotes the democratic way who urges that the channels for learning be kept free and open, who advocates a process which in itself is destructive of indoctrination, is engaging in a procedure which his practice is designed to destroy?

Practically speaking, however, people are not prevented from deserting democracy because of ignorance of other types of social organization. Nor do they need to know what other types of social organization there are from which they may choose in order to abandon democracy and submit to a new form of government. Majorities do not consciously choose to abandon majority rule. Democracy is not seriously affected by the verbal attacks of minorities. What happens is that majorities fail to solve major crises in the social situation through the instrument of representative government thus giving real basis in fact to the attacks of minorities intent upon establishing a factional control. Suppression can only postpone the day of reckoning and increase the intensity of resulting violence.

When I say that any educational system must have a point of reference and that ours is democracy, I am con-

tending for an educational technique which actually prepares and assists people, not only as children and adolescents but as adults, to function effectively in democracy. This technique has little to do with the "pep rally" by which mass enthusiasms are stimulated in behalf of what we call our democracy. It places no particular emphasis on constantly arguing the theoretical merits of democracy over any other form of government. I am speaking of a technique which starts in the kindergarten and is *applied* all the time in all learning processes through middle life. You and I are probably agreed that the thing I am talking about is simply "good teaching." There is no particular formula by which it may be put down in a sentence or two. Rather this technique is characterized best by the philosophy of democracy which gave it birth. It is described partly by the term "scientific approach" and partly by the term "discussion method." It induces critical inquiry and the habit of validating conclusions. In any case, its purpose is to respect personality and to nurture it rather than to consume it, to liberate it step by step, to let personality operate at peak capacity in the social situation rather than to regiment it to respond automatically to given signals.

We ought to spend more time in our profession in the critical analysis of our own activities in guiding this process we call education. In order to judge its relative achievement we must have that point of reference which I have been discussing, democracy. Hence, we must ask ourselves the question, Is the educational system, which we attempt to guide, building citizens for democracy?

In considering this question, may I suggest a few weaknesses in present-day education which need our particular attention.

1. There is still too much authoritarianism in the classroom. Would it not be possible to find classrooms in some secondary schools in which the teachers play the role of the drillmaster? They probably think they are teaching history or mathematics or English, but of much more importance and danger is the fact that they are training

human beings to goose-step, and failing to help them to grow up into independent self-respecting, self-disciplined citizens. Democracy, like charity, begins at home. Our home, professionally, is, in the main, the classroom. *The place to stop the growth of attitudes which prepare people for satisfactory cogs in the great machine of dictatorship is in the classroom of the public schools.* If that means that Johnny and Mary have their dates on the Napoleonic wars slightly mixed, let us not be too worried. I am saying that we need vastly more planning to induce, through good teaching, techniques for independent thinking and expression early in the learning process.

2. Closely linked with the weakness I have just mentioned is a second one. It is a tendency in some quarters, because of theories and of pressures upon school authorities, to confuse education with the idea of indoctrination. We have made the transition from the old democracy of the pioneer period, when emphasis was on the tool subjects, to the new democracy of highly complex social organization where the emphasis must be on social understanding. It is natural perhaps that many laymen and even teachers should confuse the teaching of the tool subjects with the teaching of social studies. Of course, John should be taught arithmetic. There is no discussion of the correct answer to the problem of 2 plus 2. But what trouble we get into when we take this word TEACH over into the area of controversial subject matter dealing with social relationships!

I get scores of letters and, no doubt, you do, too, from sincere people who are saying in essence that our public schools should *teach* (by which they mean *induce*) the learners to THINK some particular way on social problems, to accept certain social, economic, or political choices. Letters also come from people who are perturbed because youthful students have been permitted to come to what is regarded as wrong conclusions. So frequently it is assumed that children and adolescents should be induced by teachers to believe what their parents believe. Of course that is an

impossible task to lay on the doorstep of the public-school system. There are so many parents and taxpayers who have very different ideas about the choices which others should make. For any one of the innumerable lay groups to be allowed to enforce its will upon American citizens by using the school as an instrument of indoctrination, is contrary to our whole conception of democracy, and is grossly unfair to many other groups which have an equal right to claim a place for their ideas in the pabulum of the school's offerings.

We have yet to clarify for ourselves, and thus for the community at large, the meaning of the word TEACH when it is applied to the debatable, to the controversial, to social philosophy. Suffice it to say here, that this confusion is a definite weakness in our educational structure which has been seized upon by the propagandists and may be taken advantage of by a whole faction eager to control or prejudice the thinking of the on-coming generation. If we honestly believe in bringing youth to intellectual maturity instead of standardizing people by a process of indoctrination, we will give special attention to clarifying our position on this point and devote real energy in the defense of *teaching* as a process which impartially guides and encourages freedom of inquiry and self-validation of conclusions. *It may as well be known first as last that the teaching profession of America is not to be bribed by appropriations or frightened by attacks into acting as the carriers of propaganda for any faction, vested interest, political party, or pressure group.*

3. A third danger to consider when putting the question "Is our educational system building citizens for democracy?" is the tendency to avoid relating teaching to the present-day world and its problems. Perhaps if we could get a clearer view of the function of teaching in the social-studies field, we might be less timid in bringing youth and adults to grips with present-day problems.

When the educational system in a democracy avoids the very questions and problems of most vital significance to society it demonstrates that it has lost touch with its point of

reference. For if there is one thing which a democratic public enterprise in education should foster and develop, it is the ability of the learners to cope with the *real* issues concerning the social situation. No matter how well we prepare people in the skill of figuring sums, writing essays, typing, and bookkeeping, no matter how well we do these things, we fail in a large measure in our essential responsibility to democracy if young people leave our secondary schools without well-developed habits in the study and discussion of controversial issues. *If the educational system avoids these issues it must be responsible for shunting the real problems into the arena of mass emotion where the inexperienced person may easily be caught in a whirlpool of words to accept unquestioningly the first crackpot scheme offered as an answer to a complex social question.*

4. A fourth weakness in our educational structure of which we should be constantly aware is our failure to plan the educative process for communities as a whole involving civic education for the vast majority of adults. Probably you know how much emphasis I have been placing on this relatively new field of education which I regard as our frontier. I feel that the extensive organization of opportunities for adult education is a challenge to the existing agencies of public education in the local communities. Nothing, in my opinion, can contribute more to the improvement of elementary and secondary education than the direct participation of adults in a learning process managed by the same agency which is at work improving education for children.

Adult education gives us the great opportunity of engaging the active interest of the people in our communities in public education generally. Through this contact we can develop that community understanding which is essential to the vigorous consideration of present-day problems in the classroom. More than this, adult education will do much toward relieving the pressure upon secondary schedules commonly referred to as "stuffing the curriculum." If we can be sure that a large proportion of high-school graduates will continue the learning process in some organized way in later

life, we shall not feel so obligated to force subject material into the few years of high-school experience.

These four points are merely offered by way of suggestion of pertinent problems which should be considered when we are analyzing our efforts in the light of our function in democracy.

These problems should be more thoroughly explored in teachers institutes and should come up for discussion more frequently in teachers meetings and gatherings of citizens in general. I am hopeful that we shall soon be ready as a result of this type of discussion for a concerted drive to develop forums for the consideration of current problems by the students in high schools and colleges.

Most of you have no doubt read or heard something about the adult-public-forum project which the Office of Education has the opportunity to sponsor in 10 communities in as many different States this year. This is a small beginning in the direction of a comprehensive program of adult civic education. Is it too much to hope that within a decade we may have 10,000 professional leaders of public discussion leading at least 50,000 neighborhood groups per week in a critical, many-sided consideration of public affairs? Would approximately 60 million dollars a year be an extravagant expenditure for the people of a great democracy to make on an educational process for genuine civic enlightenment to tens of millions of adults?

As our machine civilization has become more complex, new techniques for simplified propaganda have been developed to the point of a science. Our problems are complex, but the answers which propaganda gives us are increasingly simple. Those who know the tricks of publicity and the art of mass organization can wield an influence far greater than their understanding of the problems they presume to answer. This is no time for the educational process to retreat from real issues and thus leave people prey to factionalized propaganda. The masses of people need organized help in facing the new barrage of factional appeals, in comparing propagandas, in analyzing proposals.

in getting at the facts and understanding the important alternatives of social action. The test of democracy in America will be found in the extent to which the educational technique can frustrate the appeals to prejudice, fear, and crowd emotions.

As educators we have a special responsibility for perpetuating the social ideal of democracy which is now threatened by the accumulation of unsolved problems, the unbalanced social situation, and the conflicting propaganda which result in the break-down of the community into factions.

Education for democracy means to me that we must bring the problems and the propagandas concerning them into the classroom and the public forum discussion to be analyzed in an undogmatic, tolerant spirit as the educational basis for social action.

Good!

MAKING AMERICA SAFE FOR DEMOCRACY¹

1 The Revolution To End Revolution

When the colonists cut loose from England and made the Declaration of Independence, they did a great deal more than revolt against a particularly oppressive monarch.

What they won in that Revolution was the right to try the exciting experiment of self-government, free from the dead hand of the Old World tradition and the repressing molds of feudalism.

In a real sense, it was a revolution to end revolutions. The break-down of feudalism and the rise of a new class in the beginnings of capitalism made it inevitable that the rigid system of government which refused to give way would be broken by the force of a revolution, as it turned out, by several revolutions.

The important thing about that American Revolution was that it produced a system of government in bold outlines which, if preserved and developed, would render future bloodshed in revolution unnecessary. It set up the framework for a representative government by which a free people might make changes and provide for progress, year by year, instead of permitting new needs to outrun old methods until the people should be forced to revolt.

By this I do not suggest that the early fathers did it all. Their Revolution did not guarantee an end to revolutions.

¹ A series of five articles prepared for newspapers, especially in communities in which there are to be in operation public forum demonstration centers sponsored by the U. S. Office of Education.

We cannot hope to avoid a second American revolution by merely intoning the glorious phrases of freedom and democracy pronounced by the Revolutionary fathers. Democracy and its freedom belong to those who are able to make democracy work in meeting economic and social problems in the midst of rapid and inexorable changes.

It was George Washington who said: "In proportion as the structure of a government gives force to public opinion it is essential that public opinion be enlightened. Promote, therefore, as objects of primary importance, institutions for the general diffusion of knowledge."

After considerable wrestling with the forces of Old World aristocracy, slow to accept the realities of democracy, the free public-school system was launched. In those early days, communities were small and the people gathered together frequently to discuss public problems. The town meeting was in vogue and folks met around the stove in the country store. American democracy had its real beginnings in these small public discussions.

We are told on every hand that democracy is threatened. Dictatorships have already claimed some of the European democracies, and many serious-minded Americans are afraid, with considerable justification, that our own representative government cannot survive the storm.

It should be clear to the thoughtful student of government that the chance of a minority overthrowing a government which has the intelligent support of the majority is remote. If the majority loses faith in a given government, no amount of force or suppression can prevent the government's overthrow ultimately. That is the big point about the American Revolution.

That Revolution put forward the idea that the majority should be given the opportunity at all times to have what it wants and what it will support, thus obviating any need for further warfare to wrest liberty from tyranny.

The catch in that excellent proposition lies in the question: "How shall the people know what they want and

what practical measures will give it to them?" That is the crux of the present threat to democracy.

No great number of people would vote for policies which would further impoverish them or which already had been tried and found unsuccessful. Certainly there are few people who would consciously contribute to chaos.

While people naturally do act primarily from self-interest, it is the assumption of democracy that the real self-interest of the majority shall be served by permitting the mass of people to make choices based on the facts and wide public discussion and thus discover whether self-interest is best served by promoting certain plans for the common welfare.

In a complex machine age, people have difficulty in getting at the facts and tend to organize themselves into vertical pressure groups to get what they want from government. They tend to give up trying to understand the problems of their common life, and follow demagogues who promise the pot at the end of the rainbow. At this point a democratic society begins to break down into antagonistic forces; the door is opened to dictatorships; and the hope of the American Revolution becomes dissipated.

The remedy, lies, in my opinion, in making it possible for people to organize themselves in public forums on a community basis, in a continuing search for the facts, in a stimulated exchange of opinions, in a cooperative counseling together for intelligent exercise of citizenship.

2 The Inverted Educational Pyramid

Democracy must depend upon an enlightened citizenry prepared for and capable of making intelligent choices on matters of public concern.

The sincere objectors to democracy make their strongest point when they claim that the vast majority of our citizens are not prepared and do not have the opportunities to

become prepared to make intelligent choices among problems which demand their decisions.

But I am old-fashioned enough to object to going back to the tyranny of dictatorships in the hope of getting quick action on public problems. The particular dictatorship may be just the kind that would do exactly what I think ought to be done. The rulers might even invite me to run education. (I doubt the possibility of that, because dictatorships insist on telling the people what to think. I believe in helping people to learn how to think through and form their own ideas and beliefs.)

Let us take a look at what I call the inverted educational pyramid. A conservative estimate which I made in November 1934 indicates the following:

Of some 75,300,000 adults in the United States, about 32,000,000 never completed the eighth school grade; another 32,000,000 finished the eighth grade but failed to complete high-school training. Only 9,200,000 had graduated from high school and 2,100,000 graduated from college. Lumping the high-school and college graduates together, we find that only 15 percent of our adult population has graduated from high school and college. This 15 percent forms the small base of the big pyramid. But the whole structure is top-heavy with lack of education.

An achievement for education? Certainly! But what about the 85 percent of our adult population with less than high-school education? Will anyone seriously contend that anything less than graduation from a competently managed high school can give to the masses the necessary foundation for an essential later growth in understanding the complex problems of modern times? How will this vast army in the 85 percent and the others, too, for that matter, be prepared to detect demagoguery masquerading as statesmanship in the selection of representatives competent to develop controls for a rampant acquisitive individualism?

But is graduation from high school and college in itself all that we need in the form of organized civic education? What did adults who graduated from high school or college

before the war learn in those schools about war debts, agricultural surpluses, commercial air service, problems of labor and industry, the banking legislation, and so forth? What did the college classes of 1931 learn in school that would actually help them to evaluate the merits of the W. P. A., or Federal Housing, and any number of such problems?

I must say at this point, and with emphasis, that those adults who have gone through our high schools and colleges have a technique for approaching problems, by and large. They do read more extensively and, in general, tend to balance their judgments by getting both sides of the problems in which they are interested.

That 15 percent at the base should be a leaven for the whole community. If a working democracy is important to anybody, it is of great importance to this educated minority. It is their function to share their abilities with the whole community in attacking public problems.

If this group cannot see it as an act of true patriotism to participate in a community program for adult civic education, let them do it as an act of self-preservation. Chaos and social crisis carry destruction for the values most prized by this educated minority.

I believe that while there is yet time we must build our educational structure on a new line and give it strength and stability.

The vast majority of the people, regardless of the amount of their formal schooling, have common problems in the exercise of their citizenship. This majority must be organized around those common problems and assisted in the process of arriving at their own opinions about the solutions by common council and free public discussion.

We have instruments for the distribution of ideas which can reach our vast population in the shortest time ever achieved in history. The tendency is for the strongly organized minority with definite aims to promote, to seize these instruments of communication.

The community is often broken up and organized into warring factions. In such a setting, passion and appeals

to prejudice begin to take the place of reason and sound argument.

I believe that we must extend educational opportunities, carry this problem back into the community. We must gather the people in our schoolhouses and other meeting places, confront them with all sides of public questions, stimulate them to debate and discuss among themselves. This is a democratic answer to the danger of demagoguery. This is the American way to meet unsound and dangerous doctrine.

The remedy for the threat to democracy is more democracy.

3 The Des Moines Plan for Adult Civic Education

Many Americans have sensed the need for a constructive plan to undergird our democracy with an enlightened adult citizenry.

How can such a program of adult civic education be safeguarded against being used by the propagandist or the vested interest to control public opinion?

The only way a democracy knows by which to solve such problems is the way of experimentation. In one case, the Carnegie Foundation, interested in finding a way to meet the need, appropriated enough money to carry on an experiment in a typical American community. That community is Des Moines, Iowa.

This is the fourth year of that experiment. Last year tens of thousands of young people and adults in Des Moines attended public forums for the discussion of social, political, and economic problems.

These people represented a good cross-section of the population of 150,000 inhabitants. Their active participation is an eloquent testimony to a very keen community interest in public discussion.

We appropriated the schoolhouses there as fortresses in the program to end civic illiteracy. Almost every night in

the forum season groups meet under trained forum leadership.

Let me describe just two phases of our Des Moines experiment in a planned system of public forums.

The program is based on a broad foundation consisting of fortnightly neighborhood forums. Adults can attend these relatively small meetings held in places which are usually within walking distance of the homes in the vicinity.

Rich and poor, schooled and unschooled, these adults come together, actuated by a common purpose—to educate themselves in the realities of economics and government in order that they may better discharge their civic responsibilities.

Here the trained-group-discussion leader, approaching the sessions as a coseeker for facts and truth, brings a technique for insuring the greatest possible sharing of ideas and knowledge. His is the function of chairman, resource person, and interpreter.

He must help those who find it difficult to express what they wish to say to get at the heart of *their* ideas. By skillful use of questions and by playing conflicting ideas being expressed one against the other, he teaches, *not what point of view is right*, but how to think through in a cooperative way and analyze with a critical eye.

Bankers, corner storekeepers, clerks, and unskilled workers meet in these centers. The inevitable result is a development of the community spirit, a diffusion of tolerance, and an understanding of the problems which democracy asks a free people to solve. Then we have the city-wide forums where hundreds or even thousands of people gather. Here we use a different technique.

First, the program of a season aims to present speakers and leaders of thought in public affairs with widely differing points of view. Second, the main speaker is surrounded by what we call a panel.

The panel consists of some members of the community who agree with the speaker and some who disagree or even oppose his views with great conviction. The panel members are people who have some knowledge of the subject under dis-

discussion and the ability to express themselves. After the speaker has used about 40 minutes in presenting his subject, he takes his chair and engages in discussion with the panel for an hour. During the last 20 minutes the audience participates.

Thus, the community audience at a large city-wide forum witnesses men and women of some experience in public discussion attacking controversial problems in a spirit of free inquiry and fair play.

The speaker who substitutes appeals to passion and prejudice for sound argument and presentation of evidence is at a definite disadvantage in such a public affairs forum. The members of the panel insist that he present facts to support his assertions and face him with their own counter opinions and evidence to support their opposing points of view.

During a single school year approximately 575 forum meetings are held in this city of about 150,000 people, and at each meeting a competent, well-trained, and well-paid forum leader is in charge.

Many people inquire whether these forums might not become breeding places for the distribution of *unsound* or *dangerous* ideas. I ask such inquirers, "What makes an idea dangerous?"

To me, a dangerous idea or proposal is one which does not fit the facts, is therefore unsound, but is accepted by large numbers of people unquestioningly, and is able to attract even more people.

I believe that truth can make a very good showing in the presence of error. The American way is to answer unsound doctrine with true doctrine. Unsound ideas become much less dangerous when the light of public discussion plays upon them freely. An unsound idea is dangerous only when there is a good chance of its wide acceptance.

A community-wide public-forum program makes it more difficult for unsound ideas to get accepted in the competition of a free and open market place.

4 The Protected Freedom to Learn

Democracy postulates itself on free speech, free press, and free assemblage.

Growing out of these general principles is the idea of academic freedom, which I call "the protected freedom to learn."

There is a very healthy discussion now in progress nationally among educators and laymen on the importance and meaning of academic freedom.

Roughly speaking, there are two schools of thought on academic freedom. One group subscribes, to a greater or lesser degree, to the idea of indoctrination, which implies that academic freedom means freedom of the teacher to *preach*. The other group puts forward the position that indoctrination is in education what dictatorship is in politics. This group asserts that academic freedom is the right of the student, adolescent or adult, to learn.

I belong to the second group. Of course, if the student is to be protected in his right to learn, the teacher must be free to *teach*. But there is a difference between *teach* and *preach*.

The whole question of academic freedom is a difficult one to discuss briefly, because, in general, the public is not very clear in its thinking about what we mean by *teach*.

The question is further complicated by the fact that we are still very young in the practice of democracy even in education, and therefore find it difficult to avoid the natural impulse to make our educational system *indoctrinate* rather than *educate*.

Teach should not be thought of as a synonym for *advocate*. Teaching is impartially managing a learning process which permits the learners to get at the facts and make their own choices of possible conclusions. Advocating on the part of the educator under the title of teaching, places the teacher in the position of making the choices and then seeking acceptance from the students, which inevitably

leads toward blocking the opportunity for free choices by learners.

The teacher, adult educator, or forum leader has the difficult task of functioning in two areas of human thought.

In one area, he is engaged in imparting what is generally accepted as fact. Napoleon *was* defeated at Waterloo. Hydrogen and oxygen *do* combine to produce water. The national income *did* drop from about 89 billions in 1929 to 45 billions in 1933. These are facts, generally accepted either as a result of scientific research or authenticated statistical accumulation.

The second area in which the teacher must function deals with controversial questions involving economics, social problems, and government. A teacher who makes a careful study of the first area is bound to put facts one and two and three together and reach a conclusion. That cannot be avoided.

But, however convinced he may be of the correctness of *his* conclusions, the real teacher must avoid using his classroom or forum platform as a pulpit from which to ~~preach~~ his conviction to the students, to *impose* his views on the learners or listeners. That is not an easy order for the average human being to fill. It is exceedingly difficult for anyone to avoid displaying at least indirectly by emphasis, choice of words, and a dozen unconscious modes of expressing beliefs what his own conclusions are. But there is a vast difference between presenting one's conclusions as *one* among *many* and using the classroom or forum as a place to agitate for the acceptance of one's conclusions on controversial subjects.

Real democracy is still very much of an ideal. We have only touched the fringes of its infinite possibilities. Likewise, real teaching is an ideal to be approached with great effort and discipline, perhaps never quite attained.

I believe that we can depend on the good-will and honest endeavor of the vast majority of our teachers once they have a clear picture of the *ideal* of democracy in teaching, to strive toward it. But in this connection it is important to

note that the ideal of *teaching* will never be approached, teachers will not strive to attain it, if they are in any way or for any reason forced to represent vested interests—political, economic, or social. To be free to *teach*, schools must be free of all partisan influences because such controls thrive on the use of propaganda.

I am expressing a position which asserts that the *rights of students are primary* and precede the rights of the teacher or forum leader as an individual. The very concept of free speech is based on the belief that it protects the people who make up the audiences in their primary right to hear. The protection of the speaker in his right to speak freely is only incidental to the greater protection of society in its democratic right to listen, to get facts and ideas by which to reach judgments.

There are certain very definite techniques for avoiding the perils of indoctrination and protecting the right of the students to learn. For example, I think we should make use of the forum method of presenting controversial subjects more and more in secondary schools, in colleges, and in adult classes.

The teacher in social studies must increasingly assume the role of counselor to the students in the search for conclusions, taking advantage of every device for getting direct presentation of partisan positions.

Democracy in the learning process is the protected right of the learner to make choices, to reach his own conclusions as a result of his own intellectual effort.

As soon as the student is deprived of the opportunity to hear or read an important point of view or conclusion with its supporting evidence, he is by that much robbed of his inalienable democratic right of choice. If he hasn't received an honest view of a particular idea, how can he be expected intelligently to choose or reject it?

Likewise, when a given idea or important conclusion is dishonestly presented or the personal view of the teacher or speaker is exclusively or emphatically given, the student is deprived of an opportunity to make a free choice.

The planned program of forums on public affairs can help to solve this important question of academic freedom by demonstrating in the adult field a technique for guaranteeing an open market in ideas and protecting the right of a free people to *hear* and *discuss* all important ideas on public affairs as a basis for making choices in the exercise of citizenship.

The function of education is to lay out the important ideas current in the world today in an orderly display so that the American people can choose for their own future. Should a particularly zealous forum leader persist in trying to force his pet ideas on his audience, the independence of the people, if they have been disciplined through education in freedom of inquiry and not in acquiescence through domination, will no doubt express itself vigorously.

I invite the careful thought of my colleagues in education and of laymen on this problem, because I believe that in its solution, according to the patterns of democracy, may rest the future freedom of our people.

5 A Nation-Wide System of Public Affairs Forums

One of the major purposes of the Des Moines experiment in community adult civic education through public forums was to demonstrate what could be done in a typical American city *so that* the program would be taken up by other communities.

With the Des Moines experiment as a starting point, and profiting from the experience of forums elsewhere, I believe there should be launched a long-time program through which there will be established forums as "meeting places for the discussion of public questions in the cities, hamlets, and on the farms throughout the length and breadth of the land", to quote the words of President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Why should it eventually be a Nation-wide program encouraged and sponsored by the Federal Government under

the mandate given by Congress to the Office of Education "to promote education"!

In the first place, ordered progress in a democracy requires that people in all parts of the country have relatively equal opportunities for civil education and public discussion. If one part of the country makes a great advance over the other parts in an understanding of national problems, progress is necessarily retarded by the unenlightened part, and sometimes outright conflicts develop which are disastrous.

The old story of the five blind men and the elephant applies here. A great deal of fighting has engaged the energies of human beings, due simply to the fact that different people saw different aspects of one problem and failed to put the parts together, thus failing to understand it as a whole.

I believe that any educational process to be really valuable must take in the widest possible range of students. It is what we know in common that counts in producing democratic action. So, I conclude, that any program for public enlightenment to be of real value must be Nation-wide.

In the second place, to create a Nation-wide program with fairly equal opportunities to the masses, the program will have to be sponsored by some Federal agency. The agency in Washington established for such a purpose is the Office of Education.

I wish to say that so long as this Office is an office of *education* and not a ministry of propaganda, the country need have no fear of such a sponsorship. Up to date in its long history since 1867, this Office, so far as I have information, has not been controlled by the coercions of political pressure; it has been respected for its devotion to *education*.

Later, I expect to make some public pronouncements to point out how I think the Education Office in Washington may be even more securely placed in the structure of our Government to protect it in performing its indispensable and vital function in preserving and improving American democratic self-government.

Perhaps no function of our Government is more thoroughly organized for democratic action than our systems of

education. The local community takes the direct administrative responsibility and yet its work is coordinated with other communities through the State department of education, and these in turn find an avenue of cooperation in the United States Office of Education. Our whole system participates in a fruitful sharing of the problems, mistakes, and successful methods in all communities.

In order to get a widespread adult civic-education program started in many parts of the country at a time when democracy sorely needs the defense of enlightened public opinion, I propose the establishment at first of a number of "experiment stations", or demonstration centers, financed by the Federal Government but administered and completely controlled by the local education authorities.

For a period of 3 years this program ought to be developed with Federal funds, building from relatively few centers the first year to a larger number the third year. There should be at least one demonstration center in each State during the third year. The chief limitation during the early years in which this essential twentieth-century contribution to democracy is being developed will be the relatively small number of available, competent forum leaders.

At the end of this 3-year period, the acid test of democracy will be applied to the experiment. We would then say to the local communities, "Has this program produced the results in public enlightenment which warrants continuation and expansion? If so, it is now time that you carry the burden of financing local administration and share the cost of leadership with the Federal Government."

In all, I visualize a 10-year program, which will finally reach a goal of 10,000 trained public forum leaders at work in all the cities, towns, and rural districts in the Nation.

Let me close this series of articles by enumerating some of the benefits of a planned, Nation-wide system of forums on public affairs.

1. People in all sections of the country will come to look at public problems from a national instead of a sectional point of view. The understanding of the problems of various parts of the country will dispel the foolish notion that one section can profit at the expense of the others, which at present characterizes so much of our political speech making. People will begin to learn that we cannot grow rich by picking each other's pockets.

2. The American people will begin to reclaim the essential equipment of a democratic form of government, the ability of the citizenry to discuss problems in public. Our people will begin to dig themselves out of the avalanche of words and ideas which has descended upon them from the new mechanized instruments of communication. Once again we may witness independent Americans standing on their own feet in their own public forums speaking their minds to one another.

3. A tolerance and balance ought to grow out of these forums as they have in Des Moines. Once the rabble-rouser is faced with a panel and a free open forum, people will fear him less, and perhaps stop building him up with denials of his civil liberties. The average American would rather go where he can get all sides; he has a penchant for a game played fairly according to the accepted rules. This plan makes that feasible and thus produces that community balance and tolerance which are so essential to a democracy.

4. The action gatherings of Americans, mass meetings, political conventions, etc., will begin to take on a more intelligent atmosphere. People trained to speak their minds, trained to be critical of the ballyhoo artist, schooled in seeking solid thought, will inevitably insist that their organized groups for action follow a more intelligent procedure and come to grips with the facts.

5. After a few years of national adult civic education conducted on a professional basis in public forums under democratic control, the demagogue with his cheap but effective bag of tricks will find himself facing different

audiences. He will find it difficult to "rope" the American people in by appeals to prejudice, sectionalism, fears, and unquestioning wishful thinking. He will find that there are relatively fewer prejudices around to play on, and instead a large mass of people who demand to be shown, who insist on a decent display of evidence and logic and sincerity of purpose.

6. Certainly we can expect that very shortly our people will express a new enthusiasm and interest in public affairs. We can expect that politics will be raised to its proper level of importance, the level which our forefathers envisaged when they set up our Republic, and thus attract the finest and ablest people in the community. The public business is the first business of the American people and it deserves the very best leadership our democracy can produce.

There are many other results which ought to be fostered by this program, but the ones I have given indicate the importance of undertaking the venture.

I repeat, that forum leaders are not to be engaged to tell people what to think, but to help people organize their thinking on public affairs. And the reason that forum leaders will avoid the former and follow the latter is because the American people will insist that they do so.

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