LET US HAVE PEACE

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by

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Last Sunday General W. Bedell Smith, the Under Secretary of State, speaking as the head of our delegation in Geneva said: "This beautiful setting of lake, river and mountains breathes an atmosphere of peace. In Geneva's streets citizens from scores of countries, speaking dozens of languages, pass each other without molestation, intent upon their lawful occasions. Yet in the council chamber of the Palais des Nations are present the tensions of a divided world. We Americans do not regard the people of any country as our enemies. . . If the peoples throughout the world could make good their deepest feelings, there would be an enduring peace."

Coming from a four-star general, those were particularly eloquent words. The correspondents, hungry for leads which will make headlines, scorned them as empty and meaningless. Far from it, I know they were spoken with deep sincerity, an expression of a profound conviction. Indeed, I think that over the years, going back as far as General Leonard Wood, I have heard more honest and more moving statements regarding peace from warriors than from any other single group. They have experienced at first-hand, not only the cost in life, but the agony of decisions to take and to sacrifice life. They know the awful responsibilities such decisions entail; they are acutely aware of the disaster wrong orders can bring.

Those of us who are engaged in education have done a great deal of talking about peace. Looking back over forty years of active connection with higher education, I am depressed by the wishfulness, the sentimentality, and the unreality of much that has been said in school and college on the subject of peace. Occasionally there have been symbolic actions of one sort or another. Some of us remember the peace parades of the thirties. It is not necessary to speculate whether those demonstrations were
manipulated by Communists; it is necessary only to reflect upon their utter futility as empty gestures.

Through the years there has been much more preachment than action. One thing in particular stands vividly in my mind regarding most of the talk: peace has always been somebody else's responsibility, either that of our government, or of the Japanese government, or of the Russian or of the Chinese. The key to peace was always in somebody else's pocket: we were forever asking others to use it.

While the educational world has shown so much concern for international peace, there has been too little done to bring peace in the particular area where we have direct and immediate responsibility, and where the strife has been costly to national — and to world — interest.

War among educators

I suggest that the key to our special and very important kind of peace is in the pocket of each one of us. During these forty years there has been war among educators. It has been a very modern kind of war, a cold war, a war of nerves, if you will, a war of propaganda. There have been innumerable statements, shrill, irritating, often utterly unfair, and certainly ungenerous.

People in public education have accused those in private institutions of snobbery: private institutions have accused public institutions of selling their educational birthright in order to engage in empire building. Secondary schools have accused the colleges of antequated, confining, and undemocratic entrance requirements. Colleges have accused the secondary schools of debasing the educational coinage so badly that the college has to spend two years in teaching the rudiments which had been neglected in earlier years in order to make room for activities which were sentimentally motivated and intellectually sterile.

The technical schools have accused the liberal arts of a program designed for the aristocracy, unsuited to the world in which we live. The liberal arts colleges have accused the teachers colleges of
overemphasis upon methods without adequate attention to substance. The teacher-training institutions have accused the universities of having no concern for the techniques of instruction which research has revealed.

Parochial schools have accused public schools of being godless; public educators have accused the parochial schools of biased teaching. These are but random samples of the war of words. If I were to list, even in compressed form, all the charges and countercharges, all the accusations and denunciations that have filled the air of the educational world over the last forty years, it would not only exhaust my time but try your patience far beyond the breaking point.

Educational pressure groups

The war has been not only a war of words; police action has been rather vigorous. Embodied in the statutes of almost all our states are laws passed at the instance of educational pressure groups. These define, for example, with spurious precision how many hours of “education” one must have in order to teach. The words “spurious precision” are strictly accurate, for the laws read as though all people learned at the same rate, as though all courses were of equal value. Moreover, all such statutes tend to conceal the fact that teaching is an art in which the creative process must find expression if the teaching is to be effective.

Nearly every profession or occupation for which special training is appropriate now is controlled, to some extent, by such laws or regulations. It is embodied in law, for example, that one may not even take a bar examination unless he has fulfilled certain educational requirements which are expressed in terms with no relevance to what may have entered the mind of the candidate. Across the nation there are laws and governmental regulations about engineers, chemists, nurses, doctors, pharmacists, veterinarians, and dozens of other professions.

Taken all together they constitute a tangled wilderness, a veritable statutory jungle; men have written into rigid specifications things which cannot be
defined in material terms or measurements of time. Almost all are tainted with a warlike spirit; few, in fact, are designed solely for the purpose of protecting the public interest; often they are, as I have indicated, the work of pressure groups who, to some extent at least, have sought to identify their own interest with the public interest. Many have done so without adequate evidence to justify any such pretension.

“Standards”

In addition to the legislative and regulatory authority of the states, there are many volunteer policing organizations, some of which exercise extraordinary extra-legal power. They set what they please to call “standards,” often upon markedly authoritarian bases. By various pressures they seek to enforce their own requirements upon all who can be forced to submit. This intellectual policing has gone so far that several great educational associations joined in a defensive measure. They set up a vast and costly mechanism, called the National Commission on Accrediting; it undertook to police the policemen — and with the inevitable result.

A close examination of the standards of these accrediting agencies shows them to be, for the most part, the application of material measurements to immaterial realities. Time, space, numbers, degrees, buildings, volumes, these are the measures offered; it is a statistical maze. What is the consequence? Diploma mills still flourish; yet institutions of complete integrity find themselves harassed, their management badgered, their energies dissipated, and the control which is supposed to reside, by charter, in boards of trustees or regents or fellows is distributed among various pressure groups, each operating with responsibility for the whole. It constitutes a trespass upon a basic postulate of American education — decentralized control, outside any bureaucratic regulation.

These policing organizations are not so much instruments for supporting the weak or lending them strength as is often pretended; the evidences of helpfulness are few and far between; indeed the accrediting agencies have sometimes abused the
weak. More often they have proved to be instrumentalities for harassing the strong. One of our great universities with a proud tradition of two centuries had one of its most distinguished schools discredited because a pressure group, in the name of "standards," disapproved of the administrative organization by which the school was governed within the university. One of our great state universities had the same experience with another professional school on precisely the same basis. The numbers of instances of this type of guerrilla warfare, jungle fighting, and unauthorized sniping could be multiplied indefinitely.

**Key to educational peace**

When, therefore, I say that the educational world has always pretended that the key to peace was in someone else's pocket, I am speaking by the book. I suggest the time has come to reach into our own pockets and there find the key to educational peace. When we have quiet in our own house, we can with more appropriateness ask the neighbors not to make so much noise.

The key to peace in the educational world is precisely the same as the key in the international world, just as General Smith saw it on the streets of Geneva. It is a recognition that differences are legitimate. In a country as vast as America, with as diverse a climate, with as varied a topography, with as complex an economy, with a social structure made up of many races and national strains, educational variety should be treated as an asset, never as a liability.

There is a place for every kind of education that now exists; there is room for many other sorts with which we are as yet unfamiliar. There is a place even for institutions whose standards are not high, since social pressures induce many students who cannot meet rigorous standards to seek as much education as they can absorb; under the thesis of democracy — equality of opportunity — it is essential to supply that need.

There is unlimited opportunity for the great state universities with their diverse and complex
structures and their democratic determination to teach everything that the people may want. That was once known as the “Wisconsin idea”; it was, and still is, a valid concept in so far as commonwealths can afford to finance it. Equally there is room for those institutions with a simple structure and a narrow goal that have determined to do with excellence only the limited range of things they can do exceptionally well.

There is room for the public school and the private school, for those which have a religious center and those which are exclusively intellectual in their ideals. There is room for technological institutes, for schools of commerce and business, for teachers colleges, just as there is room for colleges of liberal arts, and a need for schools of art and music.

There are many races, many tongues, many customs, many religions, many economies, many cultures. We shall not know peace until such differences are not merely tolerated but treated with profound respect. There are also many kinds of education and training which must survive or perish together.

We speak of the end of prejudice as though prejudice were chiefly racial, religious, or a matter of color. There is loud demand for fair employment practices acts, as though prejudice were only economic, or social. Yet the prejudices which have ridden American education, the manifestations of bias against other forms of education are not only as real, they are as vicious, so far as the search for national unity is concerned, as those about which there has been so much public agitation. They have also proved costly in wasted time, effort, and funds.

Educators should seek peace among themselves

Our teaching with reference to peace will take on new meaning and have a fresh persuasiveness if we first cast the beam from our own eyes. Let us look at one another as General Smith looked at that polyglot multitude in Geneva, each intent upon his “lawful occasion,” each uttering his own argot, each tending to his own business in an atmosphere of mutual respect.
Peace in the educational world would facilitate a mobilization of moral and intellectual forces which the nation desperately needs; it would put an end to sniping, bring a cease-fire in an old guerrilla warfare. It should be a peace with neither victory nor defeat. That is the only kind of peace which ever persists. The harsh victor has never attained peace; the resentful victim has always nourished Irredentist dreams. Only a negotiated peace has any chance of long survival. Today education is wasting precious energies and meager resources in bootless strife. The way to peace is to stop this stupid and wasteful process.

Rhode Island College of Education

In this centennial year I hope Rhode Island College of Education, reviewing its past, will take a reasonable pride in its accomplishments. Even more, however, I hope it will pour most of its energies into a forward-looking program. Let it seek to realize its own appropriate goals, and neither yearn for other fields to conquer nor feel overly critical of those who do not choose to follow in its train. I hope the rest of us in this compact state will take as our keynote those diversities of a thousand kinds which give Rhode Island color and interest. Its many racial, religious, economic, social, and political threads can be woven together to toughen the fabric of democracy. In union is strength; the strength of the American union is the strength of an infinity of differences united for a single end.

In this Centennial we greet the College of Education; we look upon its work as important and distinctive, yet feel no temptation to ape its procedures. In education there are as many goals as there are people; we will best perform our function if we help the student to find the school or college that meets his personal need, and then let that need be fulfilled by the institution in the manner best adapted to its tradition and its particular mission. May the next century find progress for the College of Education in new buildings and enriched curricula. Meanwhile let each of us use the available key to educational peace.