

- To develop democracy in a country, we need to avoid the spirit of anarchy and the spirit of fanaticism, says Bertrand Russell.

EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY

It is clear that you need a fair amount of education before democracy becomes at all possible. To start at the extreme point, if your population is illiterate, the machinery required for democracy does not work. But I am not concerned with this elementary portion of the matter. I am concerned rather with the kind of education that is necessary if one is to avoid the pitfalls into which many democracies have fallen and which have led in many cases to dictatorships.

There is a curiously difficult line to be drawn psychologically if democracy is to succeed, because it needs two things that tend in different directions. On the one hand, every man needs to have a certain degree of self-reliance and self-confidence, a willingness to back his own judgment; on the other hand, he must be willing to submit to the author-

ity of the majority when that authority goes against him. One or the other of these two things is very apt to fail. Either men become too subservient and follow some vigorous leader into dictatorship; or they are too self-assertive, they do not submit to the majority, and lead their country into anarchy. The business of education in relation to democracy is to produce the type of character which is willing to advocate its own opinion as vigorously as may be, but is also willing to submit to the majority when it finds the majority going against it.

There are two different parts of what education has to do in this matter — on the one hand the relation to character and the emotions, and on the other hand the intellectual part. I should like to say something about the part that has to do with character and the emotions, although it is, in the main,

much more a matter for the home than the schools. It is so important that we can not pass it over, but in this respect schools for parents are as much needed as schools for children.

If democracy is to be workable, the population must be relatively free from the fiercer emotions of hate and destructiveness and also from the emotions of fear and subservience. Now, these are emotions which are inculcated in early childhood. A parent of average ferocity attempts to teach his child complete obedience, and makes him either a slave or a rebel. What is wanted in a democracy is neither a slave nor a rebel, but a citizen; but you cannot get the proper emotions for a citizen out of an autocratic type of parent, nor, of course, out of an autocratic school.

It is clear that too much discipline is not a good thing if you want to produce a population capable of democracy. If you want to get people into the habit of initiative, of thinking for themselves, you must get them into attitudes of neither sub-

servience to, nor rebellion against, authority.

This brings us to a source of trouble to a great many democrats, namely, what is called "principle." It is wise to scan rather skeptically most talk about principle, self-sacrifice, devotion to a cause, and so on. If you apply a little psychoanalysis to it, you find that it is not what it appears to be; it is really people's pride, or hatred, or desire for revenge, that has got itself idealized and collectivised and personified in the nation as a noble form of idealism. For example, the particular sort of idealism which consists in joining together to kill people in large numbers and is called patriotism, belongs with a certain type of cruelty, of unhappiness, of unsatisfied needs, and would tend to disappear if early education were emotionally what it ought to be.

The whole modern technique of government in all its worst aspects is derived from advertising. Advertisers are the practical psychologists of our day and discovered long ago that what makes you believe a propo-

sition is not the fact that there is some reason to think it true. Someone puts up a simple statement mentioning somebody's soap or pills beside a railway line, and the mere fact that the name is there in the long run causes you to think that it is good soap or those are good pills. The modern dictators do the same thing. You see their pictures everywhere, hear their names everywhere, and it has much the same effect on you as the advertisements of the pills and soap. In all countries which have autocratic government there is combined with that a creed, a set of beliefs to be instilled into the minds of the young while they are too young to think. And the beliefs are instilled, not by giving reasons for supposing that they are true; the mechanism is purely one of parrot-like repetition, insistence, mass hysteria, mass suggestion.

This is not the sort of thing to be aimed at in a democracy. Opposing beliefs, taught in this hypnotic fashion, produce two crowds of people who clash, and there is no means by which you can mitigate that clash.

Each hypnotized automation feels that everything most sacred is bound up with the victory of his side. Such fanatical factions are quite incapable of meeting together and saying, "Let us see which has the majority." That would seem altogether too pedestrian, because each of them stands for a sacred cause.

I do not mean to say that there are no sacred causes, but I do say that you want to be very careful before you claim that your particular nostrum is sacred and the other man's something devilish. We have to have a kind of tolerance toward one another, and that tolerance is much easier to have if you think, "Human beings are fallible, and I am a human being. It is just conceivable that I may be wrong." Dogmatic certainty is extraordinarily dangerous. If you are quite certain you are right, you will infer that you have a right to stick a bayonet into anybody who does not agree with you, and even to asphyxiate his children with poison gas.

The advertisers led the way; they discovered the technique of producing irra-

tional belief. What the person who cares about democracy has got to do, I think, is deliberately to construct an education designed to counteract the natural credulity and incredulity of the uneducated man. I should start very young. If I had to run a children's school I should have two sorts of sweets — one very nice and the other very nasty. The very nasty one should be advertised with all the skill of the most able advertisers. On the other hand, the nice ones should have a coldly scientific statement, setting forth their ingredients and consequent excellence. I should let the children choose which they would have, varying the assortment from day to day. After a week or two they would probably choose the ones with the coldly scientific statement. That would be one up.

Suppose there was a question of an excursion to the country. I should have on the one hand marvelous advertisements with colored posters about some very unpleasant spot, and about another very pleasant place I should have just maps and

contour lines and statements as to the amount of timber in the neighborhood, put in the driest language conceivable.

In history I should take them through the great controversies of the past, and let them read the most eloquent statements in favor of positions that no one now holds. For example, before the American Civil War, Southern orators — who were magnificent orators — made the most moving speeches in defense of slavery. Reading them now, you almost begin to think that slavery must have been a good thing. I should read children all kinds of eloquent defenses of views that nobody now holds at all, such as the importance of burning witches.

When they had grown a little impervious in that way, I should give them rhetoric in the present dealing with current controversial questions. I should give it to them always on opposite sides. I should read them every day, for example, what is said about Spain, first by the *New York Times* and then by the *Daily Worker*. In time, perhaps, they would

learn to infer the truth from these opposite statements.

The art of finding out from the newspapers what it was that happened is a very difficult one indeed, and one that every democrat should be taught. There is a great deal to be done in this direction if people are to be capable of understanding how to judge a political question. I do not want to teach people one opinion or another; it is not the business of education to do that. The business of education is to teach pupils to form opinions for themselves, and they need for that purpose to be rather impervious to eloquence and propaganda, to be on the lookout for the things that are intended to mislead, and to be able to pick out what really is argument and base themselves on that.

I do not know whether any of you have had occasion to look up a newspaper of Great War days. If you had, you would be astonished. Because as you read it a sort of hot blast of insanity comes out of the page at you. You cannot believe that we were really all collectively in a state of excite-

ment in which one cannot see things right. Part of the business of education for democracy is to prevent people from getting too excited. It is a difficult art, because you do not want, on the other hand, that people should be without emotion. You cannot get any improvement in the world, or any kind of good life, without a basis in the emotions. But you have to be sure that basis is the right one.

I think the only emotional basis is what I should call kindly feeling — a wish, not only in regard to people you know but in regard to mankind at large, that as far as possible they should be happy, enlightened, able to live a decent sort of life. When you find other ideals, as you often do, strongly recommended in terms that sound like lofty morality, the victory of this or that cause, or any kind of thing that involves the suffering, the destruction, of some large group of mankind, then say, "That is not an ideal that any democrat can care for, because it is of the essence of democracy that we think every human being counts alike." We are not

content with a purpose that suits one group at the expense of another. The emotion that must inspire our purposes is an emotion of pain in the suffering of others, and happiness in their happiness. That is the only emotional basis that is any good. — *Bertrand Russell in The Education Digest, April, 1939.*

LEARNING AND POWER

From the time when the exercise of the intellect became the source of strength and wealth, every addition to science, every fresh truth, and every new idea became a germ of power place within reach of the people. — *De Tocqueville.*