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PUBLIC EDUCATION AND NATIONAL STRATEGY OF THE UNITED STATES

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INTRODUCTION

" 'Sputnik' is proof that our educational system is woefully inadequate." This, or some similar statement appears at the beginning of many published speeches and articles, concerning education, during the winter of 1957-1958. A comment made in another context, aptly fits public reaction, "Americans seem to feel that problems are born the day we discover them." (35) Dr. Robert M. Hutchins, of the Ford Foundation, says, "The notion that the Russians have made a great discovery in finding that intellectual power is a national asset is absurd; every serious educator in the United States has thought that for centuries." (43:58) Nevertheless, it took the shock of this single, spectacular Soviet achievement to "remove from our eyes the scales of cockiness, of complacency, and of the pride that goes before a fall". (56:77)

Definitions. The term, Education, properly concerns development of the human mind for reflection and thought. Corollary terms are Training, which implies development of skills, and Indoctrination, which indicates mere accumulation of knowledge. This distinction is important; in this paper we are considering our public school system, generally termed the Public Education System, which includes each of the above.

Captain Liddell-Hart's definition of grand strategy conveys the meaning of National Strategy as used in this study: "Coordinating all the resources of a nation towards the attainment of the goal defined by national policy." (36:335) Going beyond the narrower--military strategy--we are, therefore, concerned with the role of our human resources in winning the peace as well as the war.

Scope. Much attention is currently given educational needs, and also national strategy, but the two are generally considered separately. When thought of together, there is a tendency to think of strategy narrowly, almost like tactics. Short term objectives and individual educational changes are often emphasized. Taking a cue from the editors of Science, "The problem of using education as a constructive force in international policy (not just military), yet preserving the traditional values, poses an exciting challenge to political and military statesmanship." (65:381)

This study's primary concern is our vast network of tax-supported elementary and secondary schools. The scope has been thus limited (some limitation is necessary) because these schools are so typically a product of American culture, and such vital systems of passing our democratic way to future citizens; moreover, they are the current pivotal weakness of our educational system. The lesser emphasis on privately-financed schools and higher education implies neither less importance nor absence of problems in these areas.

A typical approach, noted in recent papers and speeches, involves a lengthy discussion of the "shocking" state of public education; this is followed by "cure-all" recommendations. Our presentation will not offer the only solutions; it will, however, reverse the approach. Believing that the "forest has been obscured by too much focus on the trees", the first step will be to suggest certain objectives and goals, which may be recalled as we explore our present school system, look at problem areas and indications of action now underway, and finally, point to additional necessary action.

PUBLIC EDUCATION AND NATIONAL STRATEGY OF THE UNITED STATES

CHAPTER I

OBJECTIVES FOR THE PUBLIC EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Our educational objective, from the frame of reference of a statesman, may be stated: Preparation of the mentality of the nation's youth to cope with problems of national strategy. Education has always been recognized as essential to achieving our moral and political objectives; has become a necessary element in our technological advancement; and now is closely related to national security. Secretary of Defense Neil McElroy has stated, "In this highly technical era, education has become as much a part of our system of defense as the Army, the Navy, or the Air Force. We must have good schools, not only because of our ideals, but for our survival." (42:4)

Within the above general objective, two specific requirements become apparent. These are submitted as realistic, essential goals for our public school system:

Preparation for all youth to be responsible, literate citizens, and

Preparation for professional education and technical training to meet requirements of our society.

The first goal can be accomplished by the schools; they must strive to equip all youth with the intellectual capacity to make the decisions, which will determine our nation's future. Producing future citizens with strong loyalty, moral conviction, and high civic courage, however, requires more than unilateral action; this is a task for church and home, as well as school.

The second goal necessitates equal opportunity for all

youth, consistent with individual abilities, to be provided adequate preparation for occupations or further education toward professions.

CHAPTER II

CURRENT STATUS OF PUBLIC EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Specific goals have been suggested. What progress has been made? Different answers are available, depending upon the evaluator's viewpoint, which in turn depends upon his background and which schools he has investigated. Having recently completed a two year study of high schools throughout the country, Dr. James Conant, President Emeritus of Harvard University, refuses to generalize. He says, in answer to frequent queries whether the schools are doing a good job: "It's like asking, 'Are American cities well-governed?" (9:26)

Evaluation From Various Viewpoints. Recent critics appear to fall into two convenient, though admittedly not all-inclusive groups:

1. Those who believe the schools have deteriorated, and
2. Those who feel the schools have improved, but not fast enough.

Both types of critics place at least some blame on the philosophy of providing equal educational treatment for all. Vice Admiral Hyman Rickover, in his numerous speeches, has charged: "Equal treatment of all pupils in the name of democracy has ruined the nation's elementary and high school education." (51:32)

For years, college professors have complained of inadequately prepared arriving freshmen, blaming the professional educators. These critics now have a nation-wide audience. Focusing their attacks primarily on so-called "progressive" methods, these professors insist that public schools spend too much time "teaching John", not enough time "teaching mathematics" (or history, et cetera). A typical

indictment comes from Professor Samuel Eliot Morison: "Professional educators are the greatest enemies not only to academic freedom but to academic excellence in the United States today. No one who has read some of the stuff printed in educational journals would believe the nonsense..... . or the shabby mediocrity of their minds." (44:130) In contrast, President Eisenhower, a former university president, recently stated, "The professional quality of American teaching is better than ever." (15:257)

Significant progress has been made toward our first goal-- citizenship education for all youth; in fact, the United States has led the world. There is not yet true equality of educational opportunity; the racial problem is far from an optimum solution. But there is no longer a choice, whether to educate a few students well or a large number less well, on the grounds that both cannot be done. American society demands both. Consequently, while the population of the United States is only four times that of 1870, the public high school population is about 80 times greater!

Progress toward the second goal, concerning careers, takes sharper focus when viewed in comparison with the highly publicized accomplishments of the Soviet Union.

Education In The Soviet Union. "Education is a weapon whose effect depends on who holds it in his hands and who is struck with it." (10:47) This comment by Stalin in 1934 indicates the top-level Soviet recognition of the strategic importance of education almost a quarter-century ago.

In that same quarter-century, illiteracy in the Soviet Union has declined from about 65 percent to less than five

percent. (10:6, 17:55)

The Soviet school system is controlled by the Communist Party, which today represents a high level of schooling; of some seven million members, more than ten percent have completed higher education, and another 25 percent have finished secondary schools. (6:555)

In contrast to the American objective of educating the whole person, the Soviet goal is a narrow training of politically committed and reliable youth for work in designated occupations which will best serve the state. Alex Korol, in his comprehensive study of Soviet education, likens the Soviet process as it has operated for 40 years to a military training program anywhere in time of war: "The individual is subordinated, fields of training are prescribed and limited, with quotas in each category, and the best possible facilities and resources are mobilized for training in the most crucially needed fields." (34:39)

In addition to state direction of individual learning efforts, the political climate of the U.S.S.R. has encouraged desires among youth for training in such relatively safe areas as science and mathematics. Whereas about one-fifth of our college graduates each year are trained in science and engineering, two-thirds of all graduates in the U.S.S.R. are so trained. Direction of these youth commences early in the schools. The graduate of a Soviet secondary school has had ten years of mathematics, four of chemistry, and five of physics. Only half of American high schools have <u>any</u> physics courses, and one third teach no chemistry! (17: 55;34) The work pace in Soviet schools is terrific; four hours of homework per day is common. Attrition is "catastrophic" by our standards; out of 1000 entering first grade, about 125 complete secondary school. (34:10)

Dr. Edward Teller feels that American science, in the past, has surpassed European because of our mass education. He writes, "We have sown our seed more widely and more fruit was borne." (58:208) But, he says, "Soviet Russia is surpassing us now because to mass education she has added the highest incentives for technical and scientific accomplishments. This competition will not be easy for us to win." (58:208) In contrast to the salaries of American teachers, Dr. Alvin Eurich, Director of the Ford Fund for Advancement of Education, points out that top-rank Soviet educators can make almost as much as the head of General Motors Corporation. (17:58)

Recent speeches and articles have overwhelmingly extolled the progress of Soviet education; there are, however, indications of weaknesses. Speakers at All-Russian conferences during the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party indicated, as common phenomena in secondary schools, "alarming" extents of "moral decay, lack of discipline, scorn of the schools and its rules, indifference, neglected homework, disobedience to teachers, and even insulting, rowdy behavior." (29:72) One speaker placed the blame on the peasant family, which "brings up its children to hate the regime, its schools, and educational methods." (29:72) Mr. Allen Dulles, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, has suggested: "Mass education in the Soviet Union may well become a threat to their own communist system of government. .....It will be very difficult, henceforth, to close off their people from access to the realities of the outside world." (13) Professor George Counts, of Columbia University, however, feels it would be a great mistake to take comfort in the "illusion" that Soviet schools are undermining the regime.

Education Toward Careers. The dramatic performance of Soviet Russia in producing scientists and engineers has stimulated suggestions for "crash programs" in the United States. I believe that merely trying to compete with communism by adopting its methods is a short-term tactic, and is far less desirable and feasible an approach than the more difficult task of formulating meaningful objectives and steadfastly proceeding toward them. Direction of careers to meet the presumed good of the state, instead of the individual, is a big step toward totalitarian life. It is worthy of note that two eminent scientific leaders, Dr. James Killian, President of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Dr. Conant insist that freedom of individual career choice must be preserved "even though it looks at times as though the welfare of the nation were suffering from it." (33:17) Our social and economic structure is based on a unique aggregate of diversified needs; national needs become apparent in career shortages, which stimulate incentives, which in turn attract personnel. William H. Whyte, in The Organization Man, points out that many of the engineers recruited by industry are not utilized in their professional capacity. Dr. Henry Wriston, former President of Brown University, cites evidence that some fifteen years after graduation, about two-thirds of our engineers (and scientists) have shifted to other more congenial or financially rewarding occupations, where their technical training is not utilized. Because there is great possibility of future dissatisfaction with impulsive career selection, he warns against "high pressure campaigns to recruit students for scientific or other careers in order to serve the national interest." (66:569)

There should, however, be no real conflict between

freedom of career choice and adequate guidance, in secondary schools, if such guidance is based primarily upon capacity for learning and discernible talent; more time can then be devoted to providing optimum education and training.

Educational Deficiencies in Armed Forces' Personnel. Serious educational deficiencies in men recruited or inducted for military service have caused difficult problems for the Armed Forces, which have been required by higher authority to procure a sizable proportion (27 percent until 1956; now eighteen percent) of their enlisted personnel from the lowest intelligence group (Category IV) of the national manpower pool. Every officer knows the problems which result for division, executive, and commanding officers. The Rockefeller Report on Education states: "During the first year of the Korean conflict, the national failure rate on the Armed Forces Qualification Test was 19.2 percent, but the failure rate for men from nine states, where income and educational expenditures are relatively low, ranged from 34 to 58 percent." (52:41) A radio commentator, Tris Coffin, estimates that educational deficiency has deprived the Armed Forces of more physically fit men than operations of the enemy! (7:3) In fairness to the schools, however, it should be noted that only about 47 percent of Americans finish elementary schools, and about half of the remainder leave high school prior to graduation. (21:187) The Armed Forces encourage potential enlistees to finish high school before "joining up". Unfortunately, there are areas where a high school diploma seems to mean only that a pupil has attended school for twelve years.

That our schools have not improved as fast as we now know to be necessary, will be noted in the following chapter.

But our public school system has not deteriorated; there is ample statistical evidence that it has improved significantly. If pupils could read and spell in the "good old days", it was only, as Sloan Wilson, the novelist, has said, "because those who could not had been dropped." (63:32)

CHAPTER III

PROBLEM AREAS

Current discussion places prime emphasis on three problem areas: physical facilities, shortage of teachers, and curriculum. In this chapter we will recognize the first two but will devote more attention to the third--curriculum, as it is related to a broader but neglected concept, which will be labeled "Psychological-Philosophical". Integral to mere continuation, and surely to any improvement, is the matter of support of schools; it is appropriate to consider this area briefly before analyzing the other problems.

Support of Schools.

Economic. We have become so accustomed to electing school boards which establish policy and administer schools that we tend to forget that the constitutional unit, in matters of public education, is the state, not the city or village. Authority has generally been delegated to local governments to support the schools through real estate taxes. In recent years, with high population fluidity from farm or small town to city, and then back to suburban areas, the local tax base is no longer adequate. During the 1957-58 school year, 55 percent of the thirteen billion dollars spent for public elementary and secondary schools came from local districts, 41 percent from states, but only four percent from the Federal Government. (59)

Other. Citizen interest in, and understanding of, the school system is generally low. Ten years ago, Dr. Conant declared: "Not one civic-minded citizen in ten knows how the schools in his town or city are financed, or what state laws affect the operation." (8:186) That the East

has no monopoly on this disinterest is indicated by a recent remark of Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona: "I have found in my own school district that over a period of 52 years, only nine percent of the people turned out to vote on important things like studies, teachers' salaries, buildings, and so forth." (7:3) This probably has been due partially to population fluidity, and may be equally due in the future to an aging population in which many property owners are retired or at least beyond the age of having children in public schools.

Physical Facilities. School construction has not kept pace with requirements. Expansion during World War II was neither immediately necessary (because of the low birth rates of the nineteen-thirties), nor possible (the national effort was required for other objectives). High birth rates during the nineteen-forties and increased population mobility have caused a critical shortage. For several years to come, regardless of the amount of effort, there will probably be an extreme shortage of adequate school facilities.

The Educational Staff. The current shortage of teachers may be attributed to: low birth rates of the thirties, limiting the available contemporary manpower pool; the relatively low social and economic status of teachers; and rising birth rates in recent years, providing large numbers of pupils. While total enrollment in public schools increased 39 percent in the last ten years, the number of teachers increased only 32 percent. (2:407)

The social status of the American school teacher, always low in contrast with other countries, has declined even further. The idea, "if you can, you do it; if not you teach", has been widely accepted in our dollar-centered

society. And, as teachers' salaries failed to increase with costs of living, the need to turn to supplemental income sources, often menial jobs, has further lowered social status.

Dr. Eurich has estimated a minimum requirement for 240,000 new teachers each year, about three times the number procured. (16:404) Dr. Alexander Stoddard, of the National Educational Association, concludes, "There are no signs anywhere that such a needed increase in teacher supply will be met by the total of all present or planned training programs throughout the nation." (57:17)

Curriculum. "What should our schools accomplish, what should they teach?" Vice President Richard Nixon says this question has been debated for centuries. (45:8) Schools have been pressured into including an incredible variety of subjects: business interests demanded vocational courses; parents, envious of private schools, succeeded in adding aesthetic courses such as art and dancing; and social problems inspired courses in marriage and safe-driving. Sir Richard Livingstone, Vice Chancellor of Oxford University, correctly describes the result when he comments, "Overcrowding in education as in housing, turns the school into an intellectual slum." (38:7) Since public education has had no publicly accepted "ceiling", the concept of "compensatory reduction", well-known to military and fiscal planners, has seldom been employed. New courses added, none subtracted, except that--the system of "electives" has made it possible for pupils to choose courses. The trend, of course, has been to avoid difficult, socially unpopular, inconveniently-scheduled, and "least-useful" courses.

To add to the problems, as child labor has become unpopular, the age-limits of compulsory education have risen.

And, as "education for all" has become standard, slow learners, as well as brilliant, have been melded into class structures as one.

The demands on our schools are summarized in the report of the White House Committee on Education: "The order given by the American people to the schools is grand in its simplicity; in addition to intellectual achievement; to foster morality, happiness, and useful ability. The talent of each child is to be sought out and developed to the fullest. Each weakness is to be studied and, in so far as possible, corrected. This is a truly majestic ideal, and an astonishingly new one. Schools of that kind have never been provided for more than a small fraction of mankind!" (57:15)

Many curriculum problems can be solved only at the "grass-roots" level; it is quite apparent that the problems of a school in the Harlem district of New York are different from those in a wealthy suburban area. Nevertheless, the crisis, we have been discussing, demands, in Senator James W. Fulbright's words, that "gentle cultivation of the personality" be supplanted by "rigorous training of the intellect". (19:475)

We discussed the shortage of scientists and engineers in Chapter II. Not only to meet our needs in these areas, but for youth, whose futures lie in almost any career, we need a broader base of scientific education, which will help them understand physical forces in the modern world; every educated person should be literate in science. This requirement will not be met easily or immediately; since, as we noted above, scientific education has been neglected, there is no sizeable pool of basically-schooled personnel to even recruit for advanced education. But steps which are being, or should be taken, are indicated in succeeding

chapters.

A narrow specialization in training even potential scientists, however, may limit their future ability to shoulder moral and civic responsibilities. Being acutely aware of Soviet cunning in its approach toward underdeveloped nations, Dr. Lawrence G. Derthick, U.S. Commissioner of Education, points out that if we are to help the new nations shape history for a better world, we must give our students a broader foundation of knowledge--providing new study material to put Asia, Africa, and other little-thought-about areas into a sharper focus. "Our children must know more about history, geography, politics, and literature on a global scale." (12:17) And surely, greater emphasis must be placed on foreign languages.

This may appear contradictory to our earlier-expressed opinion that school curricula are already overcrowded. It is therefore submitted that education should provide a foundation of knowledge which will help the youth to become a wise man. He cannot do this minus understanding of the world in which he lives. Extraneous functions will have to be reverted to their former and still rightful place--the home, the church, or other organizations.

Psychological--Philosophical. "Our young people have been corrupted by luxury; their manners are bad, and they are contemptuous of authority....they no longer rise when their elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, chatter in the presence of guests, wolf their food, and tyrannize their teachers." (24:104) This remark by a fifth century B.C. Greek, Socates, contains a commonly-held opinion today. Many schools, as social institutions, have felt compelled to fill the vacuum left by homes in areas of life adjustment. This results in undue emphasis on

passing out solutions to specific troubles, not in preparation of the student to make wise decisions as an adult.

Whereas the Soviet pupil knows that sanctions face him if he does not meet standards, which require heavy loads of homework, the American student has become accustomed to "riding along" regardless of his own application. He is unlikely to be "flunked". The tendency to cater to the mediocre has even caused report cards to be replaced by tactfully-phrased evaluation sheets. Thus, competitive spirit, with its presumed deleterious effect on mind and body, has practically disappeared from the school, except for certain types of athletics. This is not a realistic approach to life, which still includes failures as well as success. Fully as important, there is little respect for intellectual excellence. It is not our intention to decry the status of the football captain in contrast with the brilliant physics student; physical fitness is also essential to our national security. It is rather the aversion toward brilliance and the attraction toward the average or slightly above, that indicates "trouble ahead". In the past, personal wealth and power have outweighed intellectual excellence. Today, as indicated in The Organization Man, these desires appear subordinated to security, conformity, and mediocrity. (62) Nevertheless, whether wealth or conformity is the dominant trend, a phenomenal accomplishment would be American acceptance of the slogan suggested by Professor J. Francis Reintges, of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, "It is smart to be intellectual!" (49:18)

We have not stressed the tremendous social problem of segregation in our discussion primarily because it is so enormously complicated. At the risk of being trite, we merely observe that this is at least as important a weakness as any that has been included above.

CHAPTER IV

ACTION NOW UNDERWAY

The people of the United States have apparently been jolted into action, examples of which will be briefly indicated in relation to the above-indicated problem areas.

Support. The President's request to the Congress to provide funds to strengthen education, in the interest of national defense, is a public affirmation of the role of public schools in the nation's cold-war strategy. The very title of the subsequent legislation, National Defense Education Act of 1958, is recognition by the Congress of this concept. Although the legislation did not encompass all hoped-for features, its very passage is significant.

School Construction. The Congress has not yet seen fit to launch a program in this regard, despite eloquent testimony concerning needs.

Educational Staff. The National Defense Education Act of 1958 provides a financial plan which can be of great significance to the teaching profession by encouraging our best young people to enter the field. Also, retired military personnel are being provided training at various colleges to equip them for teaching in public schools. Other less direct measures to alleviate the teacher shortage include the use of television as a teaching-aid, and employment of teacher-assistants to absorb non-instruction duties. (57)

Curriculum. Many schools are dropping the "easy" courses, and again stressing science, mathematics, English, history, and foreign languages. (26:49)

Psychological-Philosophical. There are indications that schools are beginning to replace extra-curricular activities with homework, adopting less automatic promotion policies,

planning a longer school year, and requiring able students to assume additional work. (26:49)

An increasing number of secondary schools are offering college-level courses to their best seniors and juniors to accomodate particularly gifted youth; another approach is being adopted by a dozen colleges: admitting exceptional students who have not finished their last year or two of high school. (52) These programs have another value in that they develop a closer working relationship between high school teachers and college professors, long a point of friction as indicated above.

Said Walter Lippman in May, 1954, "Our educational effort today, what we think we can afford, what we think we can do, how we feel entitled to treat our schools and our teachers--all of that-- is still in approximately the same position as was the military effort of this country before Pearl Harbor." (37:38) Four years later, in September, 1958, Dr. Nils Wessel, President of Tufts University, decried lack of concern. "In spite of Sputniks, the Middle East, and the Formosa Strait, we are still only in second gear. We seem unresponsive to what in reality are chilling although elementary, objective facts." (60:6)

CHAPTER V

FURTHER SUGGESTED ACTION

Most difficult to accomplish in our society, and yet most necessary, is a marked increase in interest and understanding at the local level. As the average life-span increases, and greater numbers of people are retired, there is real danger that local interest will become even less. The implications of this factor on financial support, unless our tax structure is modernized, are alarming.

Military personnel can provide a valuable service in this regard. They are able to see and evaluate youth who are products of the public schools. Furthermore, military personnel and their families have a potential familiarity with schools of various regions; this experience can contribute to better planning at local levels.

In his recent book, Power and Diplomacy, Mr. Dean Acheson attributes the following statement to Talleyrand, "War is much too serious a thing to be left to military men." (1:29) Would that the American public would demonstrate a belief that "Education is much too important to be left to the Educators!"

More emphasis must be placed on proper guidance of youth toward useful, needed places in society. This can be best accomplished in concert with concentration on basic subjects in public schools.

Facilities, including curricula, must be developed to provide for the fast-learner to progress without being held back to any average rate.

If we accept the description previously quoted from Mr. Lippman, it is clear that we must make a breakthrough to a very much different and higher concept of what is required

and what we can do. He says, "We must lift ourselves as promptly as we can to a new and much higher level of interest, of attention, of hard work, of care, of concern, of expenditure, and of dedication to the education of the American people." (37:38)

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

We have suggested goals for our public school system in its relation to our national strategy, analyzed problem areas, enumerated current actions, and suggested some areas requiring additional emphasis.

The primary intent has been to fit our public school system into our thinking as a master weapon in our strategy in a modern world, a weapon so important that every citizen must have fierce belief in its usefulness, and intense interest in its development and future utilization.

If we, grateful to Providence for the challenge which has finally awakened us, act to combine equality of opportunity with a system in which no human talent is wasted, the United States will have the future citizens who are both willing and able to defend the basic values of a living and vital democracy in a divided world.

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