New Horizons in Education

— — International Conference at Chiemsee

THE EDUCATIONAL reconstruction in a divided world, the theme of the welcoming address by Dr. Alonzo Grace, director of the Education and Cultural Relations Division, OMGUS, was the motif of the five-day International Conference on Comparative Education, held at Chiemsee, Bavaria, late in April.

More than 200 educators from Great Britain, France, Austria, Luxembourg, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland, UNESCO and the United States attended the sessions from April 25 to 29.

The planning of the conference, both as to selection of problems for discussion and technique for selection, was predicated on certain basic assumptions which, whether right or wrong, should at the outset be briefly and frankly stated:

1. That education must be integrated and related to the needs and requirements of society and that the patterns and systems of education should be constantly reexamined with reference to the requisites of an ever-changing world (education both as to method and content).

2. That many of the most important problems and needs of the countries of Western Europe are similar, and successful solutions which are developed in one country may have applicability in other countries.

3. That one of the fundamental requirements of society and democracy must be its ability to grow and develop and that solutions which were valid for conditions and circumstances of an earlier period may have lost their validity as conditions and circumstances have changed.

Summary

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4. That in the development of new patterns and forms of education it is better to mend rather than to rend. That the inevitable laws of history, namely, that of dynamic change and continuity can be satisfied better by evolution rather than revolutions.

5. That the solutions of problems common to the western society can be attained more satisfactorily through the creative and new thinking which is stimulated and developed by joint participation than dependence upon ready-made solutions contained in elaborate analyses of a few. The final product which thus emerges and crystallizes is not the product or property of any one individual, but the common possession and conviction of the participants. This is the reason why the procedure of this conference favored panel and group discussions and restricted the function of addresses to the statement of basic facts and problems.

THERE WERE three major addresses given on successive evenings. Their subjects were the "Economic and Social Crisis of Europe," delivered by Dr. Bryn Hovde, director of the New School for Social Research, New York City; the "Philosophical and Spiritual Crisis of Europe," delivered by Dr. Conrad Bergendorff, president of Augustana College, Moline, Ill., and the "Trend Toward a United Europe," delivered by Dr. David White, chief of the Historical Branch, OMGUS, Berlin.

FOR EACH MAJOR ADDRESS a general panel discussion was organized to allow participation and discussion by the entire assembly on those aspects of the philosophy of education which are common to all levels of education. The assembly was regrouped in the afternoons into five smaller bodies in order to discuss, for a given field of education, the practical implications of the common problems and principles as they were brought out in the addresses and the general panel discussions. The fields of the group discussions were as follows:

Group I. Adult Community Education

Group II. Elementary, Secondary & Vocational Education

Group III. Higher Education

Group IV. Teacher Education

Group V. Youth Activities

An interesting thing about the titles of the addresses, as well as the addresses themselves, is the frequent use of the word "crisis." It is true that the crises were difficult but if one were to judge only from the documents of the convention, one would be likely to come to the conclusion that the period was the most critical in the history of the world . . .

It must be said in extenuation, however, that the delegates reaffirmed in many of the sessions that these crises should not lead to pessimism, but should be a stimulus to create a new world. As one person remarked: "The crises of our time constitute the opportunities of our time."

THESE CRISES were thought of as not limited to one field or phase of society, but as cutting across the whole complex of society. Their resolution would have to be found on a correspondingly broad front. Mr. Olaf Bertolt, Worker's Education Organization, Copenhagen, Denmark, appropriately asked that the obligations and responsibilities of education, with reference to groups outside of the formal education institutions, should be carefully considered and employed.

Mr. Theodor Bauerle, minister of church and education of Wurtemberg-Baden, reminded the delegates in simple and direct language, that Germany went to its disaster, not for lack of learning but for the neglect of things of the heart and spirit. Education dare not, then, concern

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itself with learning just for learning's sake, but must be related to certain basic values—values nonetheless for their being stated by some in spiritual terms and by others in secular terms.

The difference in the terms in which the values were stated had a profound effect upon the approach the delegates made to the analysis of the social, economic and political problems which they faced. The difference, stated in its most opposed form, was the reference to absolutes on the one hand and to the pragmatic on the other.

It should not be thought that this difference was only one of words or of method. The difference had already expressed itself concretely in political machinery which split the world into two camps, East and West. The conflict had not reached the stage of declared war, but it was none the less recognized for what it was—a war, a "cold war."

Even in the West, which was presumably united in its aims, there was a conflict. This conflict, too, was recognized as not yet having destroyed the social equilibrium of the West, but its potentialities to do so were admitted. This inner western conflict was expressed in the terms, "right" and "left."

Dr. Grace proposed that this struggle of ideologies was not basically in the realm of economics and politics, but between spiritual values and materialism. But what the consequences might be of the failure to solve social and economic problems upon the intellectual and spiritual content of our society was not generally discussed except from the floor by the Rev. George Higgins, visiting consultant, Religious Affairs Branch, OMG Bavaria, who pointedly stated:

"Unless we in the United States and you in Europe realize that the average working man speaking through his trade union is determined to have an equal voice, we are headed for very serious troubles. He is not going to take leadership from the so-called superior classes; he is going to play the determining role in the new society. Unless the religious-minded people of Europe, the Christians of Europe and the so-called doctrinaire socialists, can arrive at a better understanding on cultural, religious and other issues of that type, Europe is, in my opinion, headed for a vacuum, a vacuum which has been filled over a period of the past few years with the same thing, namely, Marxist Communism. Unless the western tradition has something better to offer in the field of justice, this meeting and all others are rather a waste of time."

Dr. Hovde's thesis that social problems were, in fact, more fundamental in character than the economic ones, and that the demands for economic change were to satisfy certain social wants, went unchallenged. He submitted that solutions to social demands and wants may be found in the pragmatic approach of experiment and science, "keeping in mind the ultimate goal of the good of society, protecting all and serving all in the best interests of all humanity."

It was suggested from the floor that in the United States, with its problem of racial justice that unless man was convinced on spiritual and philosophical grounds of racial justice, he would not be convinced by any

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Discussion Group Leaders Summarize Ideas

Gunnar Hirdman, executive secretary, Workers Education Organization, Stockholm, Sweden: In countries which are democratic, the State can and should assume responsibility for the provision of consultative services in adult education. Such services can be of great assistance in the furtherance of adult education and can be completely free of the elements of control and interference.

Amelie Hamaide, director of De Croy School, Brussels, Belgium: The child must be liberated; he must be educated to understand the economic and social problems of life; and he must have equality and the opportunity to share the same rights to education. Teaching must be based on scientific facts, experimentation, permitting the child to actively and personally participate... The school must be transformed into a community where we can consider the personality of every one in the interest of social life. It must be a true society where each will have his responsibilities, duties, charges... We must provide for the child teachers who understand his needs and who by their example of a sincere, tolerant life, try to attain the spiritual life which forms true human beings.

Dr. Erwin Stein, minister of church and education, Hesse: The universities have the responsibility to use the whole of their research for the spiritual welfare of society. They need a clear understanding of the ideas which are compatible or incompatible with the dignity of freedom of man... The freedom of the individual is conditioned by the essential freedom of others. No one person is in possession of truth, which can be reached by different methods and approaches.

Dr. Elizabeth Rotten, vice chairman, New Education Fellowship, Saem, Switzerland: Elementary teachers should receive better scientific training and vocational teachers—in view of their significance to the nation as a whole—should be given more respect. Educators should have a better knowledge of economic and social functions outside the school and should have the opportunity to undertake active and constructive work in these fields.

Dr. Kurt Berger, official in charge of youth culture, Kassel (Regierungs-Referent fuer Jugendpflege): The State should grant financial aid to youth groups without involving any spiritual interference. Non-organized youth should receive the same assistance and facilities as organized youth. Teachers should be brought into touch with the problems confronting youth during their non-school hours and closer cooperation should be established between schools and families. The aim of building a unified Europe can only be achieved if the youth of Europe be inspired... to feel themselves as Europeans beyond their national limits.