

The Role of Social Education in National Reconstruction

It is now fully recognised that the country cannot successfully tackle its manifold problems of reconstruction unless education makes rapid progress. With the attainment of political independence and the declared object of building a welfare state the people of the country have entered upon a tremendous experiment in democracy, its meaning and content. Even for the preservation of political democracy citizens must be educated if they are to exercise that intelligent and constant vigilance which is the price of liberty. But where the goal is to achieve a social, economic and cultural democracy the problem of education assumes special significance. Whether one is concerned with individual development or social reconstruction in training for democratic citizenship or raising the standard of efficiency in work, a certain minimum of education for the people is essential. The success of any movement depends on the quality and competence of the men and women participating in it and thus upon the educative influence to which they have been subjected.

However, the justification for a programme of adult education is not merely economic or practical-that is an instrument for making people more efficient workers or more intelligent voters. The deeper justification for such a programme lies in the fact that the lives of a large majority of our fellowmen and women are poor, barren and full of unsatisfying routine; they have access neither to economic security nor to the cultural riches which are man's most valuable heritage. Today the world has technically passed out of the economy of scarcity into the age of plenty potentially, the material and cultural resources at the disposal of modern man are unlimited-yet masses of people continue to starve, both economically and culturally in this age of plenty and, as I see it, the greatest problem of the 20th century is to enrich their life with significance. Modern conscience should not be satisfied with looking upon the peasant, the labourer, the "pretty" clerk and all others engaged in various types of humble but productive work-which really keep the world going-as mere instruments and means for serving the needs of others as just good enough to do their job and entitled, in return, to protection from starvation and possibly a bare smattering of literacy. They have to be regarded as full human beings with a capacity-possibly latent or limited to enter into the kingdom of the mind and the riches of culture with an eye for pictures and ears for music and some appreciation of good literature and dramas and art and other manifestations of beauty in life. In the past certain privileged classes have regarded these treasures as their special preserve but now the so-called 'common man' cannot be denied access to them-

both democracy and social justice affirm his right to them. In fact no one can rise to its full stature as a human being without developing three distinctive characteristics which elevate him above the level of brutish existence-his reason, his sense of right and wrong, his feeling for beauty. It is through the exercise of these qualities that man has been able to develop science and philosophy and ethical and moral codes and the flowerings of art in diverse ways and as his life impinges on these three limitless frontiers he achieves a deepening and broadening of his personality. So the broader lines of adult education must be to enrich the lives of the people. We still have a long way to go but we are moving towards it. The unwilling and bewildered adult tired out after the day's hard work grappled with mysteries of the alphabet often without any appreciation of its relevance to his life and interests. For most students this bare literacy-laboriously acquired and often-quickly lost-proved to be of little value. If people are taught to read without at the same time developing their literary taste of judgement, if they acquire the habit of reading papers or listening to political speeches without cultivating the habit of critical analysis they will be at the mercy of every advertising quack-commercial, medical, political or religious. At the second stage adult literacy was replaced by the concept of adult education which included the imparting of useful knowledge about social, civic and health problems, and which attempted to raise the student's general level of awareness. This was an improvement but it was not enough; it still remained something of an imposition from outside and not a growth from within, not a response to the expressed needs of the people.

The realisation led to the concept of social education which aims not merely at improving the mind but at raising the whole level of life-material as well as cultural. This education becomes an integral part of the various movements which are working for the social and economic reconstruction of national life. It is based on the conviction that the education of the adult can either be organised as a crusade for improving the whole social, political and cultural life of the people or not at all. It has thus come to include literacy, health education, the discussion of social and civic problems, the organisation of recreational and cultural activities and training in simple crafts and productive work.

If social education is to have required impact on everyday life of the people it must be based on their centres of interest, their games and sports, their social and religious celebration; their economic difficulties, even their pet grouses against those who make life difficult for them. Sincere and sympathetic approach in which there is no trace of condescension or propaganda will often evoke an unexpected degree of enthusiasm and interest and once these have been aroused an intelligent and tactful teacher cannot only help his adult pupils in their practical problems but he can also guide them into the rich kingdom of ideas and culture.

The state governments have organised department of social education. It has been recognised as an integral part of Community Projects and National Extension Service. All over the country there are centres run by the teachers, voluntary organisations, local bodies and educational institutions. A network of libraries is being established. An attempt is also made to draw the various media of mass communications-films, radio and press-into more active partnership in this work. We hope, if not realise the ideal at least find an adjustment between the ideal aimed at and the sobering realities of the situation that exists.