

UNESCO's First Priority

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The Commission for International Educational Reconstruction—its make-up, projects, and relation to other international organizations—is of interest to everyone concerned with education's role in working toward lasting peace. The author of this article, Harold E. Snyder, is the director of CIER, with offices in Washington, D. C.

EXCERPTS FROM A LETTER written by a principal of a small Polish school, freely translated, provide the setting for this discussion:

"The school of which I am principal is located in the village of Zaboryszki. Children come to our school from seven villages, these scattered among forests, and many children are three and four kilometres away from school.

"Our school opened first in November, 1944 right after the war front passed our village. During the occupation, Polish children were not permitted to learn. Nazi soldiers even watched the homes that children should get no instruction. Teachers guilty of giving private instruction were taken to concentration camps, from which scarcely anyone returned.

"And so the need for learning grew, and the minute the war front passed our village and we were permitted to return to our homes, we at once began to think of a school. The front was still only fourteen kilometres from our village when our school began operating. Parents of school-age children and I, as a former teacher, having retired sixteen years before, organized classes. I gave my house for the school and started teaching. Parents paid me whatever they were able—bread, grain, a goose, a rooster, milk—that was my salary; and if someone had nothing to give, the child went to school free.

"At first there were forty-three children, but before the end of the year there were sixty-seven. In March, 1945 school authorities accepted our school as a state school. Last year we had 112 children and we are now two teachers. My house be-

came too crowded, so we obtained a building that belonged to a former estate.

"We had no school furnishings when we started. People gave whatever anybody could: a table, a chair, a stool. One parent make a blackboard, others made benches. Books or copybooks were unobtainable. The children wrote upon old German posters and receipts and learned to read in old newspapers, prayer books, and calendars. It was hard but joyous work, for now this was a *Polish* school!

"Now we already have twenty-eight benches, two blackboards, four maps, abacus. Teaching aids are still lacking as schools were badly plundered and even destroyed, and our government cannot supply everything at once. We lack tables for natural science; we have no apparatus whatsoever for physics and chemistry. Books necessary for schoolwork and for the teachers are lacking. Besides, children often miss school. Many have to walk far in poor clothes and shoes. Farms are damaged or destroyed, and parents cannot afford proper shoes and clothes for their children. A large proportion of children are anaemic, scrofulous, in danger of tuberculosis, and are often sick. Last year we obtained five litres of codliver oil, but that was very little."

BLOCKS TO EDUCATION IN EUROPE AND ASIA TODAY

Anyone who has traveled in the war-devastated countries can testify that the school described in this letter is by no means exceptional. Conditions far worse than these have been reported elsewhere

in Poland, Greece, Italy, Hungary, Yugoslavia, the Philippines, China, Ethiopia, and in many other countries ravaged by the recent war. Today, more than three years after the cessation of hostilities, millions of children are still undernourished—physically, morally, educationally. Hundreds of thousands of teachers are struggling against seemingly hopeless odds to provide a minimum of educational opportunity for the youthful victims of war throughout the world. There is a struggle against hunger, lack of fuel, inflation, shortage of school supplies, absence of books, and inadequate preparation for teaching. This is the state of education in Europe and Asia at a period of world history which—within the space of a few years—may determine the continued progress or the complete destruction of democratic civilization!

Courageous Teachers Are Rebuilding

During the past two years the writer has visited schools and talked with teachers and other educators in a dozen countries. He was impressed by the fact that teachers abroad have not by any means succumbed to the overwhelming problems confronting them. They are tackling with courage, zeal, and even enthusiasm their task of reclaiming the "lost generation" and building for a peaceful world.

They greatly need, however, both material and moral support from the country recognized by all as the key to the future course of world events—the United States. Often they are cheered by signs from us of increased comprehension of their problems. Too frequently, however, they are puzzled and depressed by a seeming reluctance

on our part to assume the responsibilities of world leadership. Can we expect our colleagues abroad to understand that there should still be a few Americans—even American teachers—who fail to realize that educational opportunity has become a world problem?

Neglected Education Demands Action

Most educated Americans—particularly teachers—are reasonably well-informed concerning world affairs and are eager and willing to take positive action in the field of international relations. Americans generally are motivated by a spirit of genuine humanitarianism. Eloquent testimony to this fact is provided by the response of scores of organizations and millions of individuals to the appeals of the Commission for International Educational Reconstruction for voluntary reconstruction aid to the devastated countries. Further evidence is provided in the vastly growing interest in the work of UNESCO as indicated through participation by thousands of educational and civic leaders in various national, regional, state, and local UNESCO conferences. The enormous increase in speeches, discussions, articles, books, pamphlets, and voluntary agencies devoted to world affairs supports this conclusion.

Real progress is being made, but the surface of the problem has only been scratched. We Americans are just beginning to learn how to work effectively in the field of international relations.

THE ROLE OF UNESCO AND CIER

This confusion is illustrated by the history of our official attitude toward UNESCO. The Allied Council of Ministers of Education, established in Lon-

don during the war to prepare the way for postwar international educational collaboration, recognized that such collaboration, to be meaningful, must be based upon a realistic facing of the actual problems confronting education throughout the world. They quickly identified the first and foremost of these problems to be the re-establishment of *educational opportunity* in the war-ravaged areas. These leaders called for the establishment of a United Nations educational organization which would give primary attention at the outset to the rehabilitation of educational institutions. They recognized that to do this adequately would require the provision of funds by governments for a major intergovernmental operating program comparable in scope and in importance to that of UNRRA. This implied, of course, that the burden must be met primarily by those countries which had been spared the worst ravages of war—particularly the United States.

The position of the United States toward the nature and purpose of UNESCO has been very different from that of the devastated countries, particularly on the subject of reconstruction. There are many practical reasons for this difference in position, and especially for the opposition of the United States representatives to making UNESCO a cultural UNRRA. To review these reasons exhaustively would require an article in itself. The central point is that the educational leaders of Europe and Asia felt and still feel that our American position toward UNESCO's role in reconstruction failed to comprehend fully the nature of the problem. They believed that we failed to gauge adequately their handicaps in participating in the various

programs and projects of UNESCO. They insisted that their ability to play their full part in the achievement of UNESCO's long-range goals depended upon quick and effective world recovery from the impact of the war upon education.

Spirits Must Be Rebuilt, Too

It is extremely difficult for many of us as Americans to see, even today, that the establishment of world educational cooperation depends very directly upon American participation in efforts to reclaim and re-educate those millions of children and youth whose education had been neglected or corrupted by totalitarian regimes. We have never fully sensed the importance in postwar recovery of moral and spiritual rehabilitation. We have tended to overlook the obvious fact that the devastated countries could not be expected to handle problems of such magnitude alone and were dependent in large measure upon assistance from abroad, including substantial intergovernmental programs.

Fortunately, a few far-sighted groups and individuals did see the importance of these things and gradually made their influence felt. The American attitude toward UNESCO's emphasis upon reconstruction was gradually modified to permit its incorporation within UNESCO's program. By this time it was, however, too late to launch a major coordinated intergovernmental effort. It was not too late for UNESCO to appeal to voluntary agencies.

At the first general UNFSCO conference, held in Paris in November, 1946, reconstruction was given a prominent place upon the agenda. Soon there-

after reconstruction was given *first priority* among all UNESCO projects. The secretariat was limited, however, almost exclusively to encouragement of voluntary efforts, for the total UNESCO budget of six million dollars was obviously far too small to permit a substantial operating program.

Tangible Evidence of U. S. Concern

By the time UNESCO was organized, the Commission for International Educational Reconstruction had already been functioning in the United States for some months and was in a position to offer its services to UNESCO. Already at the first UNESCO conference, CIER was able to report a vast increase in American voluntary effort on behalf of education in Europe and Asia. By the second general conference in Mexico City, in November, 1947, 350 American organizations were working on the problem. Their combined efforts during 1946 and 1947 represented a cash value of 150 million dollars.

These scores of organizations of students, teachers, librarians, church members, nurses, civic workers, and virtually every major group interested in education have aided the devastated countries by providing books and other educational materials, fellowships, educational missions, and many other types of urgently needed assistance. Through practical reconstruction projects they have found a means of giving tangible expression to their desire for international cooperation and world peace. Thus millions of Americans have been brought into direct contact with persons like themselves in distant lands, and have grown in mutual sympathetic understanding.

Obviously, CIER has been confronted with an impossible task in attempting to accomplish through voluntary means a task of such proportions as to require intergovernmental action. It has had to depend upon stimulating and coordinating projects of national voluntary groups in the United States to meet a few of the major needs. With only a very small staff, it has had to depend largely upon publications, consisting primarily of the *CIER Handbook*, describing the work of the various organizations in this field, a *Handbook Supplement*, a *Bulletin* appearing at regular intervals, and several special publications including *Going to School in the War Devastated Countries*. The last is an illustrated pamphlet prepared especially by the UNESCO secretariat for publication by CIER.

CIER Continues with Aid

The foundation grant which has sustained the CIER expired in the summer of 1948, but the Commission's work will continue at least another year on a somewhat reduced scale, as a result of small grants by six American organizations—American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, American Council on Education, Association for Childhood Education, Educational Press Association, National Council of Chief State School Officers, National Education Association. Organizations, institutions, and individuals may continue to receive its publications by writing to CIER, 744 Jackson Place, N. W., Washington, D. C. It is unfortunately necessary hereafter to make a modest charge for the publications to cover costs.

With only a single exception the CIER has no projects of its own but

depends primarily upon the initiative of national organizations, aiding them upon request, to develop worthwhile projects. This approach through established agencies is necessary in view of the CIER's small staff. It has the further advantage of making possible the development of forms of activity appropriate to the particular interests and resources of each organization. Space does not permit a description of the myriad of worthwhile projects which have been undertaken. This may be found in the publications mentioned above.

A Cooperative Project

By way of illustration, I shall refer to only one particularly interesting activity known as the CIER Cooperative Project in International Education. This involved the close collaboration of eight national organizations—American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, American Association of University Women, Association for Childhood Education, American Red Cross, Delta Kappa Gamma, Department of Classroom Teachers, National Education Association, and the Institute of International Education. These organizations brought to the United States educational leaders from seventeen countries of Europe and Asia for the purpose of observing and studying best practices in American education, particularly teacher education, relating to problems of reconstruction in the devastated countries. Following several months of planned observation of schools and teacher education institutions, these educators participated in a four-weeks international seminar at the University of Maryland. This was the first international seminar emphasizing teacher education to be

held in the United States since the war. It was also the first international educational meeting in which a German delegation participated.

Categories of Need

American organizations are urged by CIER and by UNESCO to continue to stress during 1948-49 the provision of such services as the following:

1. Sending of books and other educational materials, working through American or international organizations with operating programs in the field (listed in *CIER Handbook*).
2. Offering of fellowships, scholarships, and study grants to permit key personnel in the devastated countries to come to the United States and other countries for brief periods.
3. Providing educational and technical missions as requested by the devastated countries.
4. Encouraging educational work camps, sometimes known as voluntary service projects, whereby American students and other workers assist in practical reconstruction projects in devastated communities abroad.
5. Making cash contributions to UNESCO's Reconstruction Fund or to American organizations, such as the National Education Association and the American Friends Service Committee, with major educational reconstruction programs.

Tackling the Children's Problems

One of the projects to be particularly emphasized during 1948-49 is increased aid to war-handicapped children. There are still in Europe and Asia millions of children who are suffering from physical, emotional, and psychological handicaps resulting from the bombing, the hunger, the cold, the loss of parents, and the horrors of enemy occupation. UNESCO is now making a special study of the problems of these children and is depending upon increased American aid. Other needs have by no means been fully met, although fortunately the lack

of simple expendable school supplies has been considerably alleviated in Western Europe.

Other activities hitherto somewhat neglected in the American voluntary effort will be emphasized during 1948-49. These include reconstruction in the fields of science, fine arts, and mass communications. Based on the reports reaching CIER, there is also need for giving particular emphasis to the general educational needs of certain countries which have tended to be overlooked by American organizations. These countries include Finland, Ethiopia, Burma, Siam, Indonesia, Korea, Japan, the Philippines, and certain of the British colonial areas badly devastated by the war, such as Malta and Malaya.

Active Participation Will Achieve the Priority

The response to CIER's appeal has far exceeded all expectations when the project was launched in 1946, but it has by no means been unanimous. American organizations and institutions, designed primarily for domestic objectives, have not found it easy to reshape their aims and their programs rapidly enough to develop action programs in international relations. That so many have been able to do so is encouraging. Many others have taken a deep interest in the development of UNESCO, but have not yet seen clearly the necessity of aiding UNESCO to achieve its first priority. This reflects in part the same natural error which characterized American

participation in the early UNESCO deliberations—that of emphasizing UNESCO's long-range goals while overlooking necessary first steps. One of the most important "facts of life" about all intergovernmental organizations is that they can only achieve their ultimate purposes of world cooperation and world peace by demonstrating their capacity to aid in the solution of practical immediate world problems.

Among UNESCO's major slogans, intended to characterize both its purpose and its method of operation, is "*Peoples Speaking to Peoples*." A second grade child hearing this slogan mentioned in connection with UNESCO said, "Now I know what UNESCO is. It's a lot of people just talking and talking and talking." All too frequently one leaves meetings of UNESCO and about UNESCO impressed with the accuracy of this childish interpretation, and with its dangers. Americans, in particular, still find it difficult to carry their genuine interest in international cooperation beyond the *talking* stage—to translate it into terms for *action*.

The ability to take appropriate action is the ultimate test of international understanding. Rightly understood the slogan, "*Peoples Speaking to Peoples*," is an *action* concept which can result, as it has in the case of the 350 organizations mentioned above, in direct meaningful contacts with other peoples and with the problems of other countries. UNESCO's success hinges in large measure upon this interpretation of its program.

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