A MANIFESTO FOR

Education

IN MALAYA
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We must begin with facts.

At the time the children were burned on big piles of wood. The crematoriums could not work at the time, and therefore, the people were just burned in open fields with those grills, and also children were burned among them. Children were crying helplessly and that is why the camp administration ordered that an orchestra be made by a hundred inmates and should play. They played very loud all the time. They played the Blue Danube or Rosamunde; so that even the people in the city of Auschwitz could not hear the screams. Without the orchestra they would have heard the screams of horror; they would have been horrible screams. The people two kilometers from there could even hear those screams, namely, that came from the transports of children. The children were separated from their parents, and then they were put to section III camp. Maybe the number of children was several thousand.

And then, on one special day they started burning them to death. The gas chambers at the time were out of order, at least one of them was out of order, namely, the one near the crematorium; it was destroyed by mutiny in a special commando in August 1944. The other three gas chambers were full of the adults and therefore the children were not gassed, but just burned alive.

When one of the SS people sort of had pity with the children, he took the child and beat the head against a stone first before putting it on the pile of fire and wood, so that the child lost consciousness.
However, the regular way they did it was by just throwing the children onto the pile.

(From the evidence of Jerzy Bielski at the Nuernberg Trials.)

This is the description, by an eye-witness, of a scene that was commonplace in Germany during the last War, a time when millions upon millions of harmless people, whose only crime had been that they had been born of Jewish parents, were burned, beaten, gassed and tortured to death. The people who carried out the burnings, the beatings, the gassings and the tortures, were not criminals, maniacs or perverts; they were ordinary German youths who had been educated to believe that all Jews were enemies of the State, and that they must therefore be exterminated.

These are facts. Facts about the sort of world we live in today. They are unpalatable facts, the sort of facts we do not like to think about. What have they to do with education in Malaya?

There is one inescapable connection, a moral so pointed that no one considering the educational system of any country in the world today in regard to its future, can afford to ignore it. In Nazi Germany, the world was shown what can be done through education. The S.S. guards who burned children as if they were so many logs, throwing them screaming on to the fire, and then watching them burn to death, were the products of Nazi education. Their example is a lesson we must never allow ourselves to forget.

The education of Germany’s youth was regarded by high-ranking Nazis as of the utmost importance in their political system. Teachers were indoctrinated with the beliefs of the party, and textbooks were rewritten to glorify Germany’s history, falsifying or ignoring unpleasant

facts where necessary. The whole of the educational system of the country was redesigned with the aim of producing a nation of fanatics, who would be prepared to sacrifice the ordinary laws governing human relationships to their obedience to the state machine. And this programme was successful. Children learned to betray their parents, their friends, and those whom they loved, in order to prove their loyalty to the Nazi party. They learned to beat up and torture those whom their leaders indicated, and with no greater incentive than that they had been told to do so. With the end of the war in Europe, when the allied armies first entered the concentration camps of Belsen, Auschwitz and Buchenvald, the world was able to understand the measure of the success of the Nazis’ educational programme. From Germany we have learnt one thing: that it is possible, through education, to produce a race of people believing whatever the State wishes them to believe, and totally devoid of normal human feelings.

This is a lesson we cannot afford to ignore. Given a government controlled by men of malignity and fanaticism comparable with that of the Nazi leaders, and a centralised State educational system, we have no reason to suppose that it would not be possible, within, perhaps, a single generation, to breed a race of fiends such as those who graduated from Germany’s schools to the Hitler Youth, and from the Hitler Youth to the S.S. Regiments and the Gestapo. In a world in which techniques of controlling and coercing individuals are studied and practised to an extent never heard of before, we cannot refuse to admit this as a possibility. And once having done so, we must immediately search about for means to prevent so terrifying a possibility from ever being realised, nor dare we rest until we have found them.

Two false trails must be avoided at the outset. Because the horrid product of Nazi Germany’s educational system was the outcome of organised and directed effort, it may be argued that all that need be done is: nothing. So long as the schools are not organised to glorify a
fascist regime, we need not worry, says one. Let matters run their own course, says another.

These are the arguments of people who can see no further than today. Because everything appears to be going well today does not guarantee that it will do so tomorrow, unless we take steps to see that it does. Because today's government is well-intentioned towards us does not guarantee that tomorrow's will be. And because an educational system is based on liberal and democratic principles today, it does not follow that an unscrupulous government would not re-organise it tomorrow along those of a police state. It is not enough to make negative plans; it is essential that positive and constructive steps be taken.

The second false trail that must be avoided is one contemplating a step which appears, at first sight, positive enough. It is to do away with state control of education, and leave it to individual and local enterprise. If there is no central authority administering the educational system, then it cannot be controlled by any one power-group, whether it is a ruthless government, or anyone else, runs this argument. Leave the organisation of schools to the good sense of the man-on-the-spot; his strong sense of individualism will not allow education to become the tool of a political party.

This advice is equally sterile and unconstructive, once we come to examine its implications. It is only through a highly-organised, and centrally-administered educational system that we are able to provide the means of educating children according to their capacities, of allowing the brilliant among them to fulfil their promise, and of helping the rest to make the best use of their natural talents, both for themselves and for the community in which they live. To relegate education to individual enterprise would be to expose these children to the whims of chance. Moreover, it must be a very naive student of current events who would believe that a party with totalitarian predilections
could not re-organise an educational system, once it had control over state administration.

Both these approaches to the problem, that of doing nothing, and that of decentralising the administration of the schools, derive from an insufficient understanding of the root of the evil itself. As it has been said of war, so it is true of totalitarian systems of government, that their causes lie, not in institutions, but in the hearts of men. And if we wish to make our country safe against that invidious, perverted revolt from within, that finds its outlet eventually in the sort of behaviour we have quoted above from the War Trials testimony, then it is in the hearts of men that we must place our faith, and not in institutions, however radical they may be.

It may be complained that what has been said so far might be true in regard to Germany, but has little to do with Malaya. So much has been spoken of ruthless and unscrupulous governments – what have they to do with us, who have just elected our own? Our governments in Malaya are composed mainly of men and women whom we have chosen to represent our views. How could they ever come to behave like the Nazis? Is it to be expected that we should stand by and let them?

Alas, in our modern, complex, twentieth-century societies, the concept of the responsibility of elected governments to their electors has become almost completely a myth. Once a constituency has elected its representative, then he may do whatever he wishes for the next five years. The only redress his constituents have is through letters to him, which he may ignore, or through the pressure of public opinion. But public opinion depends upon a sympathetic press to express it, sometimes, even, to provoke it. It is not very difficult to think of a situation, even in Malaya, where a party which controlled the leading newspapers by some means or other, could achieve power and institute a repressive regime without any organised opposition. Nor is this merely a hypothetical situation. We have seen countries with liberal traditions and demo-
ocratic institutions succumb to that conquest which comes unheralded, and from within. What we are talking about is no figment of imagination, but an ever-present danger, to guard against which we must take every measure we can devise.

It may be thought that this is mere sensationalism, arguments based on goblin noises, only intended to frighten the reader into accepting uncritically the conclusions that follow. Nothing could be further from the truth. The trouble is that we are unable to keep up with social changes; our concepts and our way of thinking are all out of date. In the field of science we seem to have no difficulty whatever, and accept such marvels as jet planes travelling faster than sound, colour television and the like, without any effort. When it comes to politics, however, we are still in the nineteenth century. So long as the ballot is secret, all will be well. The only concession to the twentieth century has been the regulations regarding candidates’ expenses. Governments are overpowered by highly-organised revolutions, whole nations are trained to think black is white, and believe it, completely new methods of mass communication are invented, but still we stick to our one great political principle — the ballot is secret.

To be aware of a danger is halfway to meeting it. The danger that is under discussion here, that of totalitarian government, under whatever name or form, is one that increases with every person who dismisses it. It is natural that, with the constitutional changes that are taking place in Malaya, the prevailing feeling should be one of confidence, enthusiasm and excitement. There would be cause for concern if it were not. But at the same time, and however confident we may feel of our ability to control our own destinies, we cannot afford to disregard the lessons that lie about us. The first lesson, and one that is most relevant to our future, is that to be learnt from the success of the educational policy of Nazi Germany.

It has been said above that the causes of totalitarianism, like the causes of war, are to be found in the hearts of men. And it is there that we must carry our battle
to defend the future of our country. For it is only in the hearts of men that we can lay the foundations of democracy. And it is only through education that these foundations can be laid. To do nothing is to deny the issue; to relegate education to local authorities and voluntary bodies, is to evade it. If we are to save our country from the indoctrination of hate and fear and suspicion on which the strength of totalitarian regimes rests, then it is not enough to try to prevent such indoctrination. We must do more. We must, in fact, do some indoctrination of our own. If we really want to ensure a future Malaya in which provision is made for the old, the sick and the needy without frustrating the enterprise of the individual; in which every child is educated according to his abilities and interests, without, on the one hand, emerging a specialist, totally devoid of knowledge of or interest in his fellows, or, on the other, becoming a member of a herd, unable to think for himself, distinguishable from the rest only by his name; in which the arts thrive and are accepted as a vital element in society; in which full employment exists without restrictions on the movement of individuals, or the limitation of trade; in which people accept their neighbours primarily as fellow-citizens, regardless of their race, religion, colour or mother-tongue — if we want all these things, then we must declare our faith in them. We must, in a phrase, indoctrinate for democracy.

Fine words! But to get down to the root of the matter, what do they mean? How can we set about indoctrinating our children for democracy? What shall we indoctrinate them with? And what do we mean by “indoctrination” in any case?

To answer these questions, it is necessary to examine a little the nature of education. We began this pamphlet by stressing the importance of facts. We may distinguish two main kinds of facts which are important in our lives. The first kind are those facts which tell us something about the way the world works: facts about machines, about flowers, about techniques, about the colour of people’s eyes, or the number of llamas in Patagonia, about
the degree of heat at which lead melts, or the height of the Empire State Building. These facts are what Americans, with that expressive brevity that so aptly informs their everyday language, call “know-how”. Let us call them *brain-facts*. If we want to make a broken-down motor-car work, or solve a quadratic equation, or analyse a chemical solution, we employ brain-facts. The learning of brain-facts does not present any special problems beyond those indicated by the difficulty of the facts themselves. We are all willing to learn things that will be of use to us, even if it requires some effort on our part.

The second kind of fact we must distinguish, is that which describes our feelings. When we want something, when we love someone, when we are embarrassed, guilty, glad, unhappy, hungry, melancholy, excited, we are undergoing certain emotions. These emotions are not the means to anything; they are end-results, situations that affect us, and that lead us to take certain actions. If someone asks us “Why are you eating?”, and we reply “Because we are hungry,” that is answer enough. He does not go on to ask “What makes you hungry?” Everybody recognises that we feel hungry from time to time. This is one of the facts of human life, in the same way that we feel affection, anxiety, the need for sleep, and so on, under certain conditions. Let us call these facts *belly-facts*. In the middle ages it was believed that the belly was the seat of the emotions, and belly-facts are facts about our emotions. They can be recognised because they require no further justification. In giving a belly-fact as an explanation, the speaker feels that he need not say any more.

“Why are you beating that child?”
“Because he stole this dollar note.”
“Why don’t you want him to steal?”
“Stealing’s wrong.”
“Why is it wrong?”
“It’s wrong, that’s all.”

“Why are you photographing that girl?”
“Because I think she’s beautiful.”