

What can ~~education~~ do to improve the foreign policy of
Knowledge, Education and Foreign Policy. a country

I am utterly at a loss what to say on a subject as vast as this. Since I have to start somewhere, let me mention that these last sixteen weeks I have been engaged in lecturing once a week - for two hours at a time - to an adult educational class in North London. The audience knew me well; we had worked together intimately before. And so I embarked on an experiment on which I had been keen for a long time. I tried to introduce them to the subject of foreign policy, without reservations or qualifications, without avoiding ~~the~~ controversial issues, rather seeking them out - ~~while the bombs were still flying.~~

On the one hand I was teaching matters like the balance of power, the Hundred Years' Peace, the Holy Alliance, the Concert of Europe, the League of Nations, social and national factors in politics, the Versailles system, and so on; on the other, ^{here was a} (we were discussing in a) group of the most variegated political complexion, composed of individuals holding widely divergent ~~views~~ views on Germany, on Russia, on France, on the USA, and for all I know, on this country, ^{Discussions} matters like post war reconstruction, the peace settlement, reparations ^{in kind}, Poland, Greece, the Jewish question, or the Prime Minister's most recent speech in the Commons. We had with us 5 or 6 dogmatic and very able Liberals, two avowed Communists, one rather intelligent person of fascist leanings, the rest being either of some shade or ~~rather~~ other of trade-union and labour opinion or persons religiously or artistically inclined. Only a very few appeared ^{altogether} ~~to be of no denomination at all.~~ The rather unexpected result was (a) The class enjoyed its work to an exceptional degree, (b) they did more (written) work than any class in my experience, (c) we never found ourselves hampered by the alleged popular prejudices current on the subject, (d) not in a single instance was there anything even faintly resembling unpleasantness caused to anybody. Personally, I do not believe that any member of the class changed his or her poli-

tical allegiance as a result of our discussions. But I definitely felt that some of them at least had become more stable, responsible, mature persons in respect to the issues in question, while losing nothing of their energy and spontaneity. And isn't that, after all what we are trying to achieve?

(Incidentally, I should have mentioned that I myself hold the strongest possible views on a number of these subjects and that I did not make in the least a secret of this. On the contrary, I put my own views for all they are worth, merely cautioning the students against the notion that my views carried any more authority than anybody else's on matters of this sort.)

It was a most encouraging experience.

However, I am afraid, that it is too slight to draw a definite moral from it. Much, I suppose, should be put down to the fact that they felt less self-conscious in the company of a non-Englishman and would readily consider aspects of the matter which they might not otherwise. Even my partisan views would not strike them as English party views and would therefore call forth less violent reactions. And so on.

Still, while we are at it, why not try to sum up this experience from the angle of our subject: How important is knowledge in international education? *foreign policy? an educated public for a good*

I do not think I ever gave the impression as if I believed that knowledge was of any special value to anybody wishing to understand foreign policy. I certainly don't believe it myself. Ignorance is not the source of conflicts between peoples. If there is no reason for conflict the fact that they know nothing about one another will not create a conflict. Should there, on the other hand, be good cause for conflict, then even complete knowledge will not eliminate it. All that can be said is that once there is such a reason ignorance makes it much easier to give a seemingly more plausible reason than the true ones, of which the

persons may be hardly conscious. Ignorance has therefore little to do with creating ~~actual~~ causes of conflict, but a great deal with assumed causes and even more with pretended ones. *It makes propaganda its main*

error, but after all propaganda is another
Moreover, knowledge of ~~another~~ peoples' character is mostly illusory.

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The situation is very similar to that in respect to individual persons. Foreign policy refers to survival, to life and death. From this angle knowledge of another person's character is even more difficult to achieve than knowledge of one's own character, and that is difficult enough... Who can know what he will be like when faced with that question?, unless he is actually faced with it? And would this not be even more true in respect to another person? Acquaintance with the every-day life of another people is of no avail in foreign policy.

To put it in yet another fashion: Where emotions are concerned, knowledge is no help to understanding. It is an exasperating truth that the more you know about a person whom you fail to understand the less you can understand him... Now foreign policy refers, as I said, to the sphere of survival and to the deeply seated emotions that go with it. This level is laid over by the every-day psychology of the individual and nothing will normally reveal its presence. Ultimately this is so because the qualities which enable us to face death are entirely different from those which help us to carry on life.

Take two recent instances. Britain's excessive appeasement policy and her subsequent splendid resistance. I know only of one student of politics, Reinhold Niebuhr, who actually foresaw the first, but he made the mistake of asserting that Britain would never fight Hitler, thus patently missing the second and just as important point. Of course it is easy to imagine that one foresaw these things, I mean, in the retrospect. Future historians will as usually confidently and complacently register the inevitability both of retreat and of rebound. But it is precisely this type of selfdelusion against which we wish to make people immune...

But it is not by discussing the nature of knowledge that we may hope to solve the problem. The answer lies in the understanding of the nature of foreign policy.

Policy is safeguarding of interest. Foreign policy is the safeguarding of a country's interest. All policy is selfregarding. This is an axiomatic. ^{therefore} Any lack of clarity on this point is as fatal as mistaking the roots of a plant for its flowers or vice versa. Countries differ and interests are extremely arguable but policy can never be else than the safeguarding of a country's interest. The moral nature of politics comes in by way of the definition of interest. This aspect can never be eliminated from politics not even when bare survival is in question. For even then the question is Whose survival? What way of life do you insist upon as ~~being~~ safeguarding the identity of your self? ~~Whom~~ Thus morality is as essential ^{national} to interest, as geography or language.

Policy can never serve interests other than those of the subject of the policy. That is why morality never enters into foreign policy under the heading of selfishness or unselfishness. If to follow one's interest ^{was} ~~was~~ regarded as selfish than in foreign policy every country is selfish, while every individual member of the country is selfless. A country's foreign policy is not designed to serve the interests of the individual but those of the country. The question: Is it in the country's interest to go to war or not? never allows of the question: Is it your interest that the country should go to war or not? In respect to his country the individual is therefore selfless by definition; the country is selfish by definition. ^{These} ~~These~~ terms are pleonastic and confusing; they mean nothing at all. That policy is selfregarding simply means that it is someone's policy, i.e., an attitude designed to attain ends. The data which determine these interests belong to a different level of the argument. There morality is as real and inevitable as geography; moral ^{facts} ~~laws~~ are as difficult to shift as mountains.

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Let me give examples of this method of aggressive sanity ~~and how it~~ may help us to live at peace with our neighbours.

First as to our neighbours abroad:

An island country lying off a continental littoral must see to it that the continent should not be dominated by one power. In order to prevent this it must follow a balance of power policy or support the weaker power against the stronger. Foreigners like to describe this under the heading of Perfidia Albion - (very naturally) while the British themselves may prefer to call it "Standing for the underdog". As long as one perceives the necessity of the policy itself it leads to a better understanding of the foreigner if one is able to agree that this "Perfid Albion" is congenitally given to protecting the underdog.

An other instance.

Britain is reproached with Canting, pretending to follow selfless policy when actually following a selfish one. The terms selfish and selfless being suspicious in this context, what is it all about? Actually, the point is of substantial interest. Good policy must ~~also~~ take account of other countries interests, so as to steer a course which offends as few countries as possible and runs parallel to the interests of as many as possible. To ~~formulate~~ *formulate* -- not in words but in deeds -- one's interests in such a fashion as to make them overlap with the interests of others is the ~~very~~ *hall-* ~~mark~~ *mark* of good policy. It will induce others to lend ~~you~~ *you* their support and to fight your battles. Now as long as your course actually runs parallel to that of others it would be foolish to hide this fact and underline your own interests (which are taken for granted) and forget ~~to~~ *to* emphasize the fact that you are, even though incidentally, defending the ~~very~~ *interests* of others than yourself. To do so is the very essence of good policy and your enemies will envy you for it. Of course, if you make a habit of it, and merely pretend to stand for other people's interests while in ~~act~~ *act*

Just look at

Finally, ~~take~~ foreign policy as a cause of conflict not between different countries, but between the parties in one and the same country. What in the heat of ~~party~~ controversy, ~~may~~ ^{may} easily appear as a ~~non-sensical~~ ^{merely} clash between the interests of different parties, is ~~often~~ ^{merely} the formulation of the country's interests from different ~~points~~ ^{angles} of view, or, ~~perhaps~~ ^{more} simply, of different interests of the country which may actually be irreconcilable. Here, especially, it is true that while the real reasons of the parties may be good ~~ones~~, their assumed reasons are often bad, and their pretended reasons ~~are~~ even worse. That is why political discussion, more especially on foreign affairs, seems ~~so~~ ^{often} so ludicrously inadequate if not downright ~~misleading~~ ^{misleading} to the outside observer. Actually, it is the observer who is mistaken, who failing to credit the arguers with as much sense as he himself possesses, ~~is~~ ^{is} taking their arguments at their face value instead of probing into the true nature of the difficulty. In that case ~~he would~~ ^{might} not only realise ~~the~~ ^{not only} true alternatives ^{that are} before the country ~~and~~ but also the reasons which make it difficult, ~~sometimes~~ ^{even impossible} ~~impossible~~ ^{forbidding} to state those ~~unpleasant~~ reasons openly without endangering ~~any~~ generally recognised interests. Take the reluctance of the Tories to back up the League in the Twenties. Actually wider commitments ~~would~~ under the Covenant would have meant an enormous strain on the British Navy ~~which would have~~ to which it would have fallen to implement League decisions through an almost permanent blockade in the Seven Seas; also in view of America's position on the Freedom of the Seas this would have ~~involved~~ ^{involved} almost instant ^{arsons} conflict with the USA, and so on. Not these reasons were ~~the~~ ^{the} most prominent ~~ones~~ ^{ones} given in public discussion. Once it was decided to

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~~oppose a League policy~~

oppose a League policy for Britain, the arguments were simply turned against the very idea of security through a League, -and the sillier ~~the~~ they were the better. ~~To listen to anti-League discussions one would have believed on mere listening to~~ ^{It is of arguments to} ~~assumed that only idiots could oppose such a policy.~~ ^{never have} Similarly ~~at~~ the disarmament policy of the Labour Party hardly ever insisted on the ~~one~~ ^{only} ~~one~~ sound reason for such a policy namely that it would ~~have~~ diminished Germany's inequality of status and ~~thereby~~ ^{thus} ~~greatly~~ helped to normalise Europe, restore the League and make it ~~ineffective, inoperative.~~ Instead Labour ~~argued~~ that disarmament was an answer to the problem ^S of the period which it most emphatically was not. To listen to Labour speakers one would ~~have~~ ^{not have been} ~~assumed~~ that they are ~~utterly~~ ^{completely} disregarding ~~all~~ the realities of the situation. ^{at} Actually, both in the case of the Tories and of Labour merely the arguments were fallacious, not also the policy advocated, once these ~~latter~~ ^{former} were ~~put~~ ^{seen} ~~in~~ ^{their true} ~~context.~~ ^{right} The same is true of ~~arguments on India, on Russia etc.~~ Apart from an irreducible difference of viewpoint ~~usually~~ given by the differing interests of the parties ^{of} and groups in question, ~~the rest of~~ ^{were} their divergencies ~~are~~ very much more ~~in the nature of~~ ^{real} ~~assumed~~ ^{about} reasons, and even more of pretended reasons ^{than about} ~~that in that of the actual~~ ^{reasons} ~~causes~~ ^{their} for diverging ~~unpopular~~ policies. Knowledge on matters of this kind serves national unity greatly.

Maybe this was one of the reasons why ^{that North London class} ~~the~~ class did not mind our seemingly fratricidal discussions.

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