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### *Education for Democracy*

**D**EMOCRACY IN CANADA is more than the right to vote: it is more than national self-government. Democracy is a way of living for free and upright people who take pride in governing not only their country but themselves.

It is natural to feel that things happening in the world are so big that the individual gets lost in the maze of complex problems and issues. But those who wish to remain democratic freemen will not give way to fatalism of the multitude which is the mark and symbol of tyrannies. The fundamental principle of democracy is that decision and direction and action do not come down from rulers but up from millions of John Smiths. In a democracy, personal effort is significant.

But how shall people govern themselves and their country unless they have learned to do so? Enlightened mass decisions are clearly impossible without widespread individual education. It need not be education in the complexities of political science or constitutional law. Democratic citizenship is skill in living together. Education, starting in the family and continuing through school and every other phase of life, should produce men and women qualified in the give and take of community living.

There are critics of democracy — and they are not all in the totalitarian countries — who declare that democracy has become obsolete, that it cannot meet the issues of life today, and that it should be replaced by some sort of managerial society. They say the modern world is too complex for popular government; that it demands technocratic dictatorship.

Supporters of democracy, on the other hand, believe that society today is too complicated to be governed well except by drawing on the talents and wisdom of the people who compose it, and that these talents and wisdom must be constantly refined and cultivated through liberal education.

#### *What is democracy?*

The noblest word yet thought of to describe a social state suited to the physical, mental and spiritual qualities of mankind is "democracy."

The democratic idea is that government should be based on the consent of the people, who should have the right to select men and women to conduct their national business; that authority should reside in the majority; that the first duty of government should be to preserve civil liberties.

However, democracy is much more than a form of government: it is a kind of society. It demands more than forms: it requires spirit. It is made up of legal practices like elections and trial by jury; but also of attitudes like tolerance and fraternity, and processes like co-operation and discussion.

The method of democracy is to rely upon the judgment of a well-informed citizenry. It is, in Abraham Lincoln's words: "Patient confidence in the ultimate justice of the people."

Patience is necessary. No democracy is yet perfect, but it seems more reasonable to regard ours as an advance from the past than to blame it for having failed to reach standards which are still in the future. The all-or-nothing, now-or-never principle belongs to dictatorships.

A person does not have to be an out and out dictator in order to be anti-democratic. The man whose spirit blows hot and cold, loving the aspects of democracy that appeal to him and resenting or ignoring those which restrict him — that man is undemocratic.

Education for democracy must kindle and keep alive the desire for freedom; it must fit free men to use their freedom well. If it fails, then men will be subverted by those who undermine faith in democratic institutions, or seduced by those who promise reward without labour.

What men are entitled to under democracy cannot be defined as "what men would like to have"; nor is it what they can manage to get; nor is it what the state thinks it can safely allow them. Democracy tries to give men what they must have in order to function fully and freely as men, including the civil liberties — freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, of religious worship, and of petition.

These are the liberties Canada offers. We make room for not only the bodies but the minds of our citizens. We cannot give freedom to anyone: what we do is create an atmosphere in which everyone feels reassured enough to be able to behave like a free human being. We offer the right described by Justice Louis Brandeis as the most comprehensive of rights and the most valued by civilized man: the right to be let alone.

### *Under the law*

Democracy does not, like some other forms of government, favour giving one man a right at the expense of other people.

All freedom is conditional: it implies adherence to the rules of the game. Traffic laws give an elementary example of the way in which conscious, free, individual action is set aside to the general benefit.

Laws must not be regarded as obstacles to be crashed through or evaded. They are vital to the functioning of society, because the only alternative to the rule of law is the tyranny of the strongest. All hope for a democratic way of life arises from the fact that through proper education men will learn the secret of compromise, of yielding where to yield a lesser point assures a greater. The laws by which they live and are judged are rules of conduct made natural and easy to them by education.

What is law? No one has improved upon the definition given by Justinian in his *Institutes* fifteen hundred years ago: "To live honourably, to injure no other man, to render to every man his due." That is a definition which covers the necessities of law in a democracy, and it is one with the requirements of which no democratic person will quarrel.

There are two extensions of strict law for which education may arouse desire. One is obedience to the unenforceable: doing gracious things which are not required of us by the letter of the law, things which are right but which cannot be legislated for. The other is to give no countenance to an act of injustice however buttressed it may be by statutes.

### *Equality*

One of the great tasks in democracy is to harmonize the principle of equality of opportunity with the fact of inequality in individuals.

Study of the history of mankind will show that complete human equality is compatible only with complete savagery. The levels of attainment depend upon individual capacities and diligence, and since men are unequal in their natural gifts of health, strength, mentality, and motivation they are unequal in their development.

Equality of opportunity in education leaves freedom for development to the peak of a person's mental capacity. Political equality, assuring to every person his status, security and liberties within the State, leaves freedom to hold opinions and express views. Equality before the law leaves freedom to do all acts which are not illegal.

Use of all these freedoms requires effort of the individual. Suppose two men to be equal at night, and that one rises at six to study or work while the other sleeps until nine, what becomes of their equality? Suppose two men to be doing the same job, and that one looks for ways to improve his work while the other is satisfied merely to do his job, what becomes of their equality?

Democracy satisfies the universal urge of men toward self-realization, because it gives scope to the unique character of individuals. It is the only form of society that puts at the very top of its agenda the opportunity of the individual to develop his potentialities.

Team work is needed, but teams are made up of individuals whose individuality must be maintained while effective co-operation is attained. A person should be prepared to play many roles with competence, but he must be allowed to play at least one role with satisfaction and distinction.

### *Democratic government*

When we think of democracy, probably the first institution to come to mind is government. It is necessary to have government if we are to have any of the other things we want.

Democratic government is not a form of government that leaped full-blown from one man's ideas, nor even one developed by several men sitting in conclave. It is the outcome of the work of many brains, over the span of many lifetimes, hardened in its beliefs, customs and duties through trial and error. It is, as was said in the French Declaration of Rights: "The expression of the general will."

And why do people set up a democratic government? To do for the community of people whatever they need to have done, but cannot do for themselves. Government is expected to reconcile social order with individual freedom and initiative; to provide the

environment in which citizens can set about the task of making themselves happy.

More is expected of a democratic citizen than that he should pay taxes and cast his vote. He has a duty to equip himself to vote intelligently. Democracy is not a magic formula whereby wise government is voted into power from blind ignorance.

Opinions expressed in a vote are counted, not weighed. There is indisputable need, therefore, for education that will qualify the voter to weigh his opinion before putting his ballot into the box.

### *In the community*

For most Canadians the opportunity to participate in democratic purposes and processes is not on Parliament Hill in Ottawa but where they are, in their communities. Our local institutions — the library, the church, the school, the newspaper, the service club, the veterans' organization — every one of these can become a centre of vibrant democracy.

We need to remind ourselves every once in a while that besides liberty and equality the spirit of democracy includes fraternity. Fraternity is the highest conception held by our greatest religious leaders and philosophers, and it is the greatest hope for continued existence of the human race.

The ancient feeling of brotherhood — whose first expression is in the family and whose second is in the community — carries obligations of respect and protection, of patience and duty.

In this fraternal spirit we seek to put at the disposal of society the fruit of our knowledge, the result of our study, the development of our innate talent, and the product of our skill as performers.

It is not enough to have lofty sentiments. We must not wrap up our fine ideals about democracy and put them away safely to be produced on judgment day as evidence of our good intentions. The man who tries to get along on only a minimal productive relationship to his community shares the predicament of the man with one talent: to lose anything is to lose everything.

We need to learn thoroughly the lessons of behaviour necessary to democracy: to meet other people in a give-and-take way, to work out problems that arise in home, school, office, factory and municipality. We must do what everyone in a democracy is expected to do, and add what our own qualities and position demand and require of us.

This is do-democracy, which provides for the creative activity of all. It is fraternity by reciprocity, in which each regards his own interest as best served by that which he knows to be most advantageous for the others.

### *Enemies of Democracy*

Some of the most dangerous enemies threatening democracy are not antagonistic systems of government but failures within ourselves: parochialism, prejudice, self-satisfaction and obsession with comfort.

Democracy demands, by its very nature, men and women of wide tolerance. We rub and polish our minds against other minds, thereby giving them new lustre. Without wide, unselfish, views there must result an oppressive provincialism, full of snobberies and taboos.

Being tolerant is making a positive and cordial effort to understand other people's beliefs and practices without necessarily accepting or sharing them. After all, as T. V. Smith writes in *The Democratic Way of Life*, "not all good men in any generation have agreed on goodness, nor all just men on justice, nor all holy men on holiness."

There are very good reasons why our education should be so designed as to prepare us to estimate the worth of conflicting theories. Without this knowledge we cannot have the three-dimensional view that modern complexities require for clear sight.

Education for democracy needs to avoid bigotry and superstition. The palace of truth is four-square, with a gate on every side, so that people may reach it from opposite points of the compass. Those who practise democracy will learn to ask of other people about a question: "How does it look from where you are?"

It is well to qualify our absolutes, to say "Yes, but . . ." or "No, and yet . . ." Such approaches are not only tolerant but they are efficient in that they leave us room to grow in knowledge.

Next to the problems of war, the central issues in a democratic society grow out of our efforts to shape our institutions so as to provide maximum security without compromising our basic freedoms. It is curious, said J. Sheed in *Society and Sanity*, how insensitive men can be to a diminishment of their essential manhood, provided they are comfortable.

The cult of easiness is a wholly inadequate guide to the goals of democracy. People who overvalue physical comforts and the material things of the world cannot hope to be rated high in an appraisal of their state of civilization. In multiplying our wants we increase the variety of forces which enter into relations with one another and which have to be learned about.

### *Education for Democracy*

As we seek solutions to our most urgent problems, we turn to education for help and guidance.

It is a fatal mistake to believe that democratic education consists of teaching children some facts about our government and making them learn the provisions of the British North America Act.

The survival of democracy depends upon the ability of large numbers of people to make realistic choices in the light of adequate information.

The principal task of education in the interests of democracy is to enlighten and discipline the minds of students, to teach them how to think clearly, to communicate intelligibly, to analyse logically, to judge decently, to decide intelligently, to cultivate their curiosity and to release their powers of creativity.

Other systems of living call for uncritical acceptance of a dictatorship's propaganda; our democratic system seeks reasoned conviction. Canada needs broadly educated men and women in all fields of endeavour, so that sound judgment operates upon sound knowledge.

### *Who is responsible?*

Every institution in society is constantly teaching its members, molding their behaviour, contributing to their development. Democracy is not a formless crowd. It is made up of groups, characterized by face-to-face relationships: the family, the church, the school, the workshop.

From marriage, the association of two persons, up to Parliament, representative of all the people in Canada, we have thousands of organizations. However different their interests or emphases, education for responsible freedom is in their hands. It is a process that begins with birth — for democracy is not inherited — and ends only with death. Fragmented institutions, each dealing with a small fraction of human requirements, must have this central theme running through their work, because it is essential to their individual and collective success.

Nor is education for democracy something needed only by young people. The world is not standing still until the children of today take over. The adults, too, need education, because they must continue to act while their children are preparing.

Study groups, meeting in neighbours' homes, are an example of one way to learn about democracy. Whether they read and apply to modern times the *Teachings of Epictetus* or read and discuss factual reports of present day events, they are learning about how the democracy of Canada links them as neighbours and with the welfare of all the world.

The democracies believe in open discussion as an indispensable preliminary to wise action. It is the source of social wisdom. It is the only way by which we can make some approach to knowing the whole of a subject.

### *Liberal minds*

The education we seek for democracy would tend to produce mature individuals with minds that know their rights, acknowledge their duties and abide their

limitations. The mature person will hear courteously, answer wisely, consider soberly, and decide impartially.

No one will deny that we must be literate, but if we are to survive as a democracy we need to harness literacy to clearly-seen ideals and to a sense of the first rate. We must clarify our values, so that we want and ask for the things which are really important.

To acquire democratic greatness we must understand the nature of greatness and admire courage and largeness of soul. We need to make sure that the men and women who enjoy prominent positions, who are the most applauded and admired, are also the most suitable models for young people to follow. Only then will society be ready to meet the challenge of its own future.

Liberal education, the food of liberal minds, should provide not only an important body of knowledge but it should sharpen our perceptions, cultivate our powers of analysis, give us insight into important phases of human activity, and enable us to have, as a matter of habit, a valuable point of view.

It should, too, train us to smile at our own foibles, to suffer with grace a joke at our own expense. Democracy, it cannot be said too often, is not a matter of high-flown phrases, stodgy philosophy and restricting rules. It provides an environment where a man can be at home with himself while being neighbourly with all his fellow-democrats.

### *As to the future*

Democracy should mean, for individuals and groups and nations, something toward which they strive, not something which they possess.

A new democracy is coming into being constantly. The democracy of Canada today would seem very new indeed to the people of Athens, and even to those of England in the eighteenth century.

Democracy can survive only by its merits, and its strength lies in recognizing its imperfections. It will die if we repose like emancipated slaves content with our own liberty.

In this time of breathtaking technological changes and social upheaval there is need for educated people who understand the process and nature of what is happening and who are able to cope with it, people whose minds are idealistic and whose feet are realistic.

Democracy is a high and difficult enterprise. Despite all the checks and balances we devise, it is not automatic. Intelligence must never slumber. We need to enlist the imagination and resources of our institutions and organizations in a vigorous effort to make our education of young and old effective in preserving the values of democracy.