

CSS PLATFORM
Realizing The Dream! – Give us a student, we give back a Bureaucrat
PATRIOTISM IN EDUCATION

Bertrand Russell

Every man has a number of purposes and desires, some purely personal, others of a sort which he can share with many other men. Most men desire money, for example, and most ways of growing rich involve co-operation with some group. The group concerned depends upon the particular way of growing rich. For most purposes two different firms in the same business are rivals, but for purposes of a protective tariff they co-operate. Money, of course, is not the only thing for which people fall into groups of a political kind. They are organized into churches, brotherhoods, learned societies, freemasons, and what not. The motives which lead men to co-operate are many: identity of interest is one; identity of opinion is another; and ties of blood are yet a third. The Rothschild family co-operated owing to ties of blood. They did not need formal articles of incorporation, because they could trust each other, and a great part of their success was due to the fact that there was a Rothschild in every important financial centre in Europe. A form of co-operation based upon identity of opinions is to be seen in the philanthropic work of the Quakers after the war. They were able to work together easily because of their similarity of outlook. Ties of self-interest are the basis of such organizations as joint-stock companies and trade-unions.

A group of men organized for a purpose has collectively only that purpose for the sake of which the organization exists. Its mentality is therefore simpler and cruder than that of any individual. The Society for Psychical Research let us say, cares only for physical research, though each of its members cares for many other things. The Federation of British Industries cares only about British industries, although its individual members may enjoy going to the play or watching a cricket match. A family as a whole cares only about the family fortunes, and is frequently willing to sacrifice individual members to this end.

Passions which are politically organized are much more powerful than those which remain unorganized. The people who wish to go to cinemas on Sundays are a totally unorganized crowd, and are politically of little account. The Sabbatarian's who wish them not to go are organized, and have political influence. The cinema proprietors also are organized. From a political point of view, therefore, the question of the Sunday opening of cinemas is a conflict between cinema proprietors and Sabbatarian's, in which the wishes of the general public do not count.

A given man may belong to a number of organizations, some useful, some harmful, some merely innocent. He belongs, let us say, to the British Fascists, to the football club in his village and to a society for anthropological research. In the third capacity he is laudable, in the second innocent, and in the first abominable. He himself is a mixture of good and bad, but the organizations have an unmixed ethical character for good or evil which is not to be found in their members. It is the purpose for which men are organized which determines whether an organization is good or bad, not the character of the men composing the organization.

These somewhat trite remarks are intended to lead up to the curious results which flow from the organization of men into States. In almost all civilized countries, the State is the most powerful of the organizations to which a man belongs, so that his purposes qua member of a State are much more effective politically than any of his other purposes. It becomes important, therefore, to consider what the purposes of the modern State are. The functions of the State are partly internal, partly external.

CSS PLATFORM

Realizing The Dream! – Give us a student, we give back a Bureaucrat

The functions of the State are partly internal, partly external. For this purpose I include local government among the functions of a State. One may say, broadly speaking, that the internal purposes of the State are good, while its external purposes are bad. This statement is, of course, too simple to be literally true, but it represents a useful first approximation. The internal purposes of the State include such matters as roads, lighting, education, the police, the law, the post-office, and so on. One may quarrel with this or that detail of administration, but only an anarchist will hold that such purposes are in themselves undesirable. So far as its internal activities are concerned, therefore, the State, on the whole, deserves the loyalty and support of its citizens.

When we come to its external purposes the matter is otherwise. In relation to the rest of the world, the purposes of a great State are two: defence against aggression, and the support of its citizens in foreign exploitation. Defence against aggression, in so far as it is genuine and needed to prevent invasion, may be allowed to be prima facie useful. But the difficulty is that the very same means which are required to prevent invasion are also convenient for foreign exploitation. The leading States of the world aim at drawing an economic tribute from the labour and the mineral wealth of less powerful countries, and employ in securing this tribute the armed forces of which the nominal purpose is defensive. When, for example, the Transvaal was found to contain gold, the British invaded it. Lord Salisbury assured the nation that 'we seek no goldfields'. But somehow or other we happened to go where goldfields were, and to find ourselves in possession of them at the end of the war. To take another illustration: everybody knows that the British went to Southern Persia from a desire to benefit the Southern Persians, but it is doubtful whether we should have taken so much interest in their welfare if they had not inhabited a country full of oil. Not dissimilar remarks might be made about some of the doings of the United States in Central America. In like manner, the motives of Japan in going to Manchuria are, of course, the noblest possible; but they happen, by some curious accident, to coincide with the interests of the Japanese.

It is not too much to say that most of the external activities of powerful States in the present day are concerned with the employment, or the threat, of armed forces, for the purpose of taking away from the less powerful wealth which legally belongs to them. Activities of this sort on the part of private individuals are considered criminal, and are punished by law unless they are on a very large scale. But on the part of nations, they are considered admirable by the citizens of the nations concerned.

This brings me at last to the subject of the present chapter, namely, the teaching of patriotism in schools. In order to judge of this teaching it is necessary to be clear not only as to its intentions, but also as to its actual effects. Patriotism, in intention, and in the thought of those who advocate it, is a thing which is very largely good. Love of home, love of one's native country, even a certain degree of pride in its historical achievements, in so far as these are deserving of pride, is not to be deprecated. It is a complex sentiment, partly concerned with actual love of the soil and of familiar surroundings, partly with something analogous to an extended love of family. The root of the sentiment is partly geographical and partly biological. But this primitive feeling is not in itself either political or economic. It is a feeling for one's own country, not against other countries. In its primitive form it is hardly to be found except among those who live in rural surroundings without much travel. The town-dweller who is perpetually changing his habitation, and has no piece of land that he can call his own, has much less of the primitive sentiment out

CSS PLATFORM

Realizing The Dream! – Give us a student, we give back a Bureaucrat

of which patriotism grows than has the rural land-owner or peasant. The town-dweller has, instead, a sentiment largely artificial, largely the product of his education and his newspapers, and almost wholly harmful. This sentiment is not so much love of home and of compatriots as hatred of foreigners and desire to appropriate foreign countries. Like almost all bad sentiments, it is disguised as loyalty. If you wish a man to commit some abominable crime, from which he would naturally recoil in horror, you first teach him loyalty to a gang of arch-criminals, and then make his crime appear to him as exemplifying the virtue of loyalty. Of this process, patriotism is the most perfect instance. Take, for example, reverence for the flag. The flag is the symbol for the nation in its martial capacity. It suggests battle, war, conquest, and deeds of heroism. The British flag suggests to a Briton Nelson and Trafalgar, not Shakespeare or Newton or Darwin. Things which have been done by Englishmen to further the civilization of mankind have not been done under the symbol of the flag, and are not called to mind when that symbol is venerated. The best deeds of Englishmen have been done by them not as Englishmen, but as individuals. The deeds which Englishmen do with the consciousness of being Englishmen, and because they are Englishmen, are of a less admirable sort. But it is these deeds that the flag calls upon us to admire. And what is true of the British flag is equally true of the Stars and Stripes, or of the flag of any powerful nation.

Throughout the Western world boys and girls are taught that their most important social loyalty is to the State of which they are citizens, and that their duty to the State is to act as its government may direct. Lest they should question this doctrine, they are taught false history, false politics, false economics. They are informed of the misdeeds of foreign States, but not of the misdeeds of their own State. They are led to suppose that all the wars in which their own State has engaged are wars of defence, while the wars of foreign States are wars of aggression. They are taught to believe that when, contrary to expectation, their own country does conquer some foreign country, it does so in order to spread civilization, or the light of the gospel, or a lofty moral tone, or prohibition, or something else which is equally noble. They are taught to believe that foreign nations have no moral standards, and, as the British national anthem asserts, that it is the duty of Providence to 'frustrate their knavish tricks' – a duty in which Providence will not disdain to employ us as its instruments. The fact is that every nation, in its dealings with every other, commits as many crimes as its armed forces render possible. Citizens, even decent citizens, give a full assent to the activities which make these crimes possible, because they do not know what is being done, or see the facts in a true perspective.

For this willingness of the ordinary citizen to become an unconscious accomplice in murder for the sake of robbery, education is chiefly to blame. There are those who blame the Press, but in this I think they are mistaken. The Press is such as the public demands, and the public demands bad newspapers because it has been badly educated. Patriotism of the nationalistic type, so far from being taught in schools, ought to be mentioned as a form of mass-hysteria to which men are unfortunately liable, and against which they need to be fortified both intellectually and morally. Nationalism is undoubtedly the most dangerous vice of our time – far more dangerous than drunkenness, or drugs, or commercial dishonesty, or any of the other vices against which a conventional moral education is directed. All who are capable of a survey of the modern world are aware that, owing to nationalism, the continuance of a civilized way of life is in jeopardy. This, I say, is generally known to all persons who are well informed as to international affairs. Nevertheless, everywhere public money continues to be spent in propagating and intensifying

CSS PLATFORM

Realizing The Dream! – Give us a student, we give back a Bureaucrat

this destructive vice. Those who consider that children should not be taught to regard wholesale slaughter as the noblest work of man are denounced as renegades, and friends of every country but their own. One would have supposed that natural affection would cause many people to feel pain in the thought of their children dying in agony. Such is not the case. Although the danger is patent, all attempts to cope with it are viewed as wicked by most of the holders of power in most countries. Military service is represented as a noble preparation for the defence of one's own country, and not a word is said to make young people aware that the military operations of their own country, supposing it to be a powerful one, are much more likely to consist of foreign aggression than of home defence.

The objections to patriotic teaching are various. There is the objection which we have already considered that, unless the virulence of nationalism can be abated, civilization cannot continue. There is the objection that it is hardly possible to teach civilized human ideals of conduct in an institution which also teaches people how to kill. There is the objection that the teaching of hatred, which is a necessary part of a nationalistic education, is in itself a bad thing. But over and above all these, there is the purely intellectual objection that the teaching of nationalism involves the teaching of false propositions. In every country of the world, children are taught that their country is the best, and in every country except one this proposition is false. Since the nations cannot agree as to which is the one where it is true, it would be better to give up the habit of emphasizing the merits of one nation at the expense of every other. The idea that what is taught to children should, if possible, be true is, I know, very subversive, and in some of its applications even illegal. But I cannot resist the conviction that instruction is better when it teaches truth than when it teaches falsehood. History ought to be taught in exactly the same way in all countries of the world, and history text-books ought to be drawn up by the League of Nations, with an assistant from the United States, and another from Soviet Russia. History should be world history rather than national history, and should emphasize matters of cultural importance rather than wars. In so far as wars must be taught, they should not be taught only from the point of view of the victor, and of heroic deeds. The pupil should linger on the battlefield among the wounded, should be made to feel the plight of the homeless in devastated regions, and should be made aware of all the cruelties and injustices for which war affords an opportunity. At present almost all the teaching is of a sort to glorify war. Against the teaching of the schools, the labors of pacifists are vain. This, of course, applies especially to schools for the rich, which are everywhere morally and intellectually inferior to schools for the poor. Children learn in school the faults of other nations, but not the faults of their own. To know the faults of other nations ministers only to self-righteousness and war-like feeling, whereas to know the faults of one's own nation is salutary. What English boy is taught in school the truth about the Black and Tans in Ireland? What French boy is taught the truth about the occupation of the Ruhr by coloured troops? What American boy is taught the facts about Sacco and Vanzetti, or Mooney and Billings? Owing to such omissions, the ordinary citizen of every civilized country is wrapped in self complacency. He knows about other nations all the things they do not know about themselves; but the things they know about his country, he does not know.

Most of the teaching of patriotism, while intellectually misguided, is morally innocent. The men who teach have themselves been taught on a wrong system, and have learned to feel that, in a world where foreigners are so wicked, only great military efforts can preserve their own country

CSS PLATFORM

Realizing The Dream! – Give us a student, we give back a Bureaucrat

from disaster. There is, however, a less innocent side to patriotic propaganda. There are interests which make money out of it, not only armament interests, but also those who have investments in what are called undeveloped countries. If you possess, let us say, oil in some rather unsettled country, the expense of getting the oil consists of two parts – first, the technical, straightforward expense of extracting it, and second, the political or military expense of keeping the ‘natives’ in order. Only the former part of the expense falls upon you; the second part of the expense, which may be much greater, falls upon the tax-payer, who is induced to undertake it by means of patriotic propaganda. In this way, a highly undesirable connection grows up between patriotism and finance. This again is a fact which the young are carefully prevented from knowing.

Patriotism in its more militant forms is intimately bound up with money. The armed forces of the State can be, and are, employed for the enrichment of its citizens. This is done partly by exacting tribute or indemnities, partly by insisting upon the payment of debts which would otherwise be repudiated, partly by the seizure of raw materials, and partly by means of compulsory commercial treaties. If the whole process were not covered by the glamour of patriotism, its sordidness and wickedness would be evident to all sane people. Education could easily, if men chose, produce a sense of the solidarity of the human race, and of the importance of international co-operation. Within a generation, the vehement nationalism from which the world is suffering could be extinguished. Within a generation, the tariff walls by which we are all making ourselves poor could be lowered, the armaments with which we are threatening ourselves with death could be abolished, and the spite with which we are cutting off our own noses could be replaced by goodwill. The nationalism which is now everywhere rampant is mainly a product of the schools, and if it is to be brought to an end, a different spirit must pervade education.

This matter, like disarmament, will have to be dealt with by International agreement. Perhaps the League of Nations, if it can spare any time from the whitewashing of aggressors, may sooner or later become aware of the importance of this matter. Perhaps the governments may agree to a uniform teaching of history. Perhaps after the next Great War, the survivors, if any, may come together and decide to substitute the flag of the League of Nations for their several national flags. But no doubt these are Utopian dreams. It is the nature of teachers to teach what they know, however little that may be. Imagine English teachers of history threatened by an international agreement with the necessity of teaching world history. They would have to find out the date of the Hegira and when Constantinople fell. They would have to learn about Genghis Khan and Ivan the Terrible, about how the mariner’s compass spread from China to the Arab sailors, and how the Greeks were the first to make statues of the Buddha. Their indignation at having such demands made upon their time would know no bounds, and they would agitate for a new government pledged to flout the League of Nations. The active energy of our time throughout the Western world is in capitalist enterprise, and is, on the whole, a force making for destruction. The classes of men who should make for something better, such as teachers, are for the most part fairly content with the status quo. Any social amelioration would involve a change in their lessons, and has on that account to be avoided if possible. The effort that they wish to avoid is not only intellectual, but also emotional. Familiar emotions come easily, and it is difficult to teach oneself to feel new emotions on a familiar occasion, such as the playing of the national anthem. And thus our modern world, where the good are lazy and only the bad are



CSS PLATFORM

Realizing The Dream! – Give us a student, we give back a Bureaucrat

energetic, goes reeling drunkenly towards destruction. At moments men see the abyss, but the intoxication of unreal sentiments soon closes their eyes. To all who are not intoxicated, the danger is clear. And nationalism is the chief force impelling our civilization to its doom.

CSS PLATFORM