

School and War

Madeleine Pelletier

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Mr. Herignoc, a professor at the Law Faculty in Toulouse, has just written an article, in the journal "Scientia", about "The Rational Organisation of the Society of Nations". He would like it to organise, on top of its organisms of direct defence against war, world education, by example by fighting illiteracy.

That is all well and good, but I think we could go further along this path of civilisation.

The mass of workers and peasants is infected with jingoism. To assert this, you only have to try and have a discussion in a foreign language in a workers' cinema or any other popular setting. Immediately, you will attract disparaging remarks: "What are they mumbling there! Couldn't they stay in their countries!", etc.

This xenophobia of the people doesn't grow unaided; obviously, tradition transmits it, but school, as it is today, only intensifies it.

History should be entirely reformed. It centres, as we know, around wars; we could even say, according to primary school history books, that history is only a succession of wars and treaties.

We must write a history which speaks less of kings, of their ministers and of their generals and more about the people. How people lived in the olden days, how work was organised, what the living conditions of workers and peasants looked like. How people lived, their food, their clothes, their houses, their furniture. What women's conditions were, how were families organised, what influence religion had, what people did for leisure, etc.

Even for small children in primary school, it could draw an abridged picture of every nation on earth, with their language, their governments, their customs.

To talk about wars would be necessary, but only to condemn them; we could say who made up armies; how recruitment was made; what the life of a soldier, a life of looting, a given death sentence; say how little human life was worth.

After such an education, people would no longer believe that foreigners are savages and that only France is civilised.

In the school courtyard, war-like games would be banned. We could replace them, for example, by something of the same kind, but with a benevolent idea: make kids play firemen, rescuers, etc.

I think it wouldn't be hard, with a ministerial decree, to ban the selling of any military toy: no more guns, swords, helmets, uniforms or tin soldiers. We could replace tin soldiers with, for example, football players, or athletes doing exercise.

Nothing pops into the brain which doesn't come from senses.

When all jingoism will be banned from education, it will disappear from people's mentalities.

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