

PSYCHOLOGY

Nursery Nazis

Stern American Parents Are Training Totalitarians, Is Charge; Lack of Restraint Makes Anarchists

By DR. FRANK THONE

NURSERY Nazis! No, that hasn't anything to do with this business in Europe, of drilling five-year-old kids with wooden guns, and teaching them to click their heels and give the stiff-arm salute. It's going on right here in America, right in the bosoms of many of our best families.

Proud parents, who have the orthodox American scorn for the ways of foreign dictatorships, are nevertheless unconsciously making their own offspring into goose-stepping little Fascists, and also instilling in the young minds of some of them the will to become Duces and Führers, some day. If there are dangers to democracy in this country, many of them are now running about in play-suits. For these, "der Tag" is still 15 or 20 years in the offing.

How typical, well-disciplined American family life can breed a fascistic

mental attitude, even in very young children, is disclosed by Dr. O. H. Mowrer of Yale University. In his work at the university's Institute of Human Relations, Dr. Mowrer has to deal with several types of "problem" children, and it was among them that he found his little incipient Fascists.

Problem children are, nine times out of ten, living records of parental mistakes. The great majority of them can be roughly separated into two divisions. There are the children who have grown up without any effective parental restraint or discipline. These are the spoiled brats, the little anarchists. Then there are the poor kids who have had an overdose of home discipline, and that frequently of an overbearing and arbitrary sort. These become the nursery Nazis.

Although the spoiled-brat variety is the kind that usually attract most attention (possibly because of their sheer obstreperousness) Dr. Mowrer finds

them less difficult to deal with than he does the over-disciplined young unfortunates. He says:

"With one class of children, namely those whose difficulties have arisen because of the laxity and inconsistency of their previous training, the problem is not particularly acute; objectionable behavior can usually be eliminated in their case by the simple expedient of providing an appropriate system of rewards and penalties which is held in force with sufficient firmness and constancy to bring about the desired revision of habitual ways of feeling and acting."

But if the psychologist finds the civilizing of brats not especially difficult, he has a far harder time with the poor kids who have been "sat on" all their lives, by authoritarian parents and teachers. They are the unfortunates who have grown up in homes where the mid-Victorian motto still prevails: "Children should be seen and not heard;" where the parental attitude is: "Minnie, find out what Willie is doing and tell him to stop it!"

Parents and teachers of this type would be astonished and indignant if they were accused of being egoistic tyrants. It seems only the normal thing to them that adults should demand and get obedience, instant and unquestioning, from the children subject to them. Many of them are apt to inflict harsh punishment for the least infraction or challenge of their rule, not because the child's act was bad in itself, but because it constituted the even graver sin of disobedience.

Bosses or Sheep

Effects of such parental or pedagogical autocracy on the minds of children subjected to its unremitting pressure are likely to be devastating, and to last through the adult lives of the victims. They will either become docile automations, responding readily to any assertion of outside authority and never maturing to the point of accepting responsibility for their own lives, or, after years of secret inner rebellion, they will themselves become self-asserting bosses of the mass. They may rise to the top as Führers and Duces, or accept intermediate positions in an authoritarian set-up, blindly accepting orders from above and as blindly exacting obedience as they



NOT DESTRUCTIVE NOW

Too interested in their painting to look around at the camera are these "problem children." The little boys were very destructive with ready-made toys and when first given packing boxes to play with they only tore them apart. But when they were permitted to paint the boxes themselves, they took pride in their workmanship and learned real respect for property.

transmit them to their cohorts beneath.

Says Dr. Mowrer:

"If the modern democratic forms of government have not been found to function as efficiently and smoothly as might have been wished, at least some of the difficulty may reasonably be sought in the distinctly undemocratic regime under which the average individual lives for the first two decades of his life.

"Children seem to react to the autocratic atmosphere of home and school either by a surrender of individuality and a life-long seeking after and dependence upon so-called 'leaders', however demagogic, or by identifying themselves with this system and struggling by means foul or fair, to become 'leaders' themselves. This state of affairs is not conducive to the success of a democratic state.

Father Substitutes

"As various writers have pointed out, kings and dictators gain much of their popular appeal by virtue of the role they play as father-substitutes for the grown-up children who are their subjects. Modern fascism springs from psychological roots which are as old as the human family and which are by no means confined to the populace of those countries in which fascism has gained official status.

"The danger of emergence and growth of such a political doctrine, with its emphasis upon subservience and blind submission to the principle of leadership, comes, not from propaganda and pressure from outside, but from a country's own internal educational and economic institutions.

"No one, I believe, can at present point with certainty to the solution of this important problem; but surely encouragement of greater independence and emotional self-sufficiency in children and practice in the resolution of their social difficulties by democratic techniques is a step in the right direction."

Desirable though the move toward solution suggested by Dr. Mowrer might be, it took considerable faith and courage to put it into actual operation with real, live problem children. For in plain and simple terms it meant taking a batch of these long-repressed youngsters, loosening up all the "don'ts, and leaving them pretty much to themselves to take the consequences of their own acts.

In practice, of course, they weren't left to complete anarchy, but their supervisors really did heroically restrain impulses to set things right, so long as the kids

LIFE'S BEGINNING ON THE EARTH

By R. BEUTNER

Outlines of a vision

On the hot and sultry early earth, loaded with lifeless organic matter, violent thunderstorms raged. Unspeakably brilliant and powerful lightnings played in the heavens, loosing frightful forces upon the carbon containing gases of the atmosphere, bringing into existence numerous compounds of carbon. After millions of years, self-regenerating enzymes were formed. The amount of these substances constantly and inevitably increased, inevitably because their peculiar chemical action led to the marvel of transformation of other organic material into the enzyme itself. Thus one enzyme produced another, filling the oceans with material more and more closely resembling the substance of living plants and animals. Slowly the organizing forces of crystallization and osmosis acted upon this material: living organisms appeared and kept on developing to a bewildering multitude, of incomprehensible complexity.

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kept clear of total wreck. And in the end this heroic experiment in democracy justified itself.

After a sufficient period of experience in wrestling with their own problems, the children quite generally approved self-government system. What opposition there was came mostly from adult outsiders. Dr. Mowrer answers these critics with the suggestion that those who disapprove democratic self-government for children are akin to those who in every society "strive to achieve or maintain positions of power and special privilege by promoting servility on the part of the masses."

The first thing that had to be done with the group of over-repressed children with whom Dr. Mowrer worked was to let them learn for themselves the difference between "don'ts" that are arbitrary and meaningless, and "don'ts" that really mean something—that are warning signs on the road to trouble.

The 24 members of the group, ranging in age from four to twelve years, were called together. It was explained to them that in the future they might meet, with the adults who were taking care of them, whenever it seemed necessary. They were to deal for themselves with whatever problems might arise.

Utilitarian Morals

The idea of social morality was put on utilitarian basis. It was pointed out that stealing, for example, was objectionable not simply because grownups might say it was "wrong" but because if one child could "get away with it" presently there would be no safety for the belongings of anyone. Similar utilitarian values were explained for telling the truth, keeping clean, and so on.

Naturally, the kids were not expected to take the grownups' word for all this. They were left to learn from experience the practical truth behind the precepts.

On one occasion, four or five small boys thoughtlessly broke out some window screens on a play-porch. Their offense was brought before a meeting of the group, and the culprits were told that they had to earn the money to pay for the damage they had done. This of course took time, and during the interim the screens were left just as they were. The whole group were bothered enough by flies and mosquitoes so that they had the lesson of respect for community property firmly fixed in their minds.

"A few such empirical lessons made the restraints essential for harmonious cottage life take on a reasonableness

which could have scarcely been achieved through arbitrary adult enforcement," comments Dr. Mowrer.

The whole experiment came out better than anyone had expected, he states: "Some of the advantages which accrued from this new regime had, of course, been anticipated but others had not.

"As enforcement of the necessary regulations and prohibitions was taken over more and more by the group itself, the staff members ceased to be regarded primarily as disciplinarians, who were to be outwitted, harassed, or placated, as the occasion might demand; and the total number of infractions which had to be dealt with decreased at a remarkable rate. The children became much freer in their relationships with the adults, able to share their phantasies and to speak about matters which, because of previous anxieties or resentments, would have been impossible to discuss.

"Soon the cottage meetings also came to be used as occasions for reporting commendable as well as objectionable behavior, and an additional motive for good behavior, in the form of a desire for group praise, was thus added to the

already existing influence of group disapproval.

"In the beginning it was found that the children were inclined to be more severe with each other than an adult would have ordinarily been under similar conditions. Since the meetings are always conducted under the supervision of representatives of the staff, over-severe punishment could always be toned down to be in keeping with the offense. This placed the adults in the strategic position of being able to befriend and protect the offender instead of having to be aligned against him."

Be it remembered, too, that this group of children started from away behind scratch. They came to Dr. Mowrer a badgered lot of embryo Fascists. They learned democracy by practicing it, by applying its methods toward the solution of their own problems. In this small-scale test, therefore, there would seem to be justification for Jefferson's dictum: "The cure for the ills of democracy is more democracy."

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PHYSICS

Radioactive Grease On Metals Will Detect Surface Flaws

SPECIAL greases that give off piercing radiation are now being used by scientists to detect flaws in metals, it was reported to the American Society for Metals by Herman F. Kaiser of the staff of the U. S. Naval Research Laboratory, Washington, D. C.

The Navy already uses piercing rays from radioactive materials to see inside heavy armor plate and spot flaws. The newer method, if it works out successfully, would supplement this practice by bringing out tiny surface flaws which might escape attention.

In the tests, Mr. Kaiser indicated, compounds of thorium, which are weakly radioactive and liberate radiation, are mixed with amber petrolatum. This material is smeared over the metal under study. The coated metal is then placed in a chamber where the grease is forced into any crack by a pressure of 1,000 pounds to the square inch.

Next, the surface is cleaned with alcohol to leave only the grease which has penetrated into cracks. The metal is then carefully wrapped in photographic sensi-

tive paper and stored away for a week.

On development of the negative, those portions over a crack containing the grease show up as dark streaks on a white background.

The method is reminiscent of the original discovery of X-rays by Roentgen, who found that light-shielded photographic plates were exposed by X-radiation.

The method, too, resembles a common rough test used by geologists to test a piece of ore for possible content of radioactive material.

Much work on the technique will probably be needed before it can go into standard use, Mr. Kaiser pointed out, but "the possibilities offered by the natural radioactive elements are found to be quite promising."

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Within three years 448 Wisconsin beavers have had compulsory moving days to keep them from building dams where they would cause destructive floods.