

GENERAL SCIENCE

# Conant on Education

Harvard president proposes plan for military strength without disrupting college study; adequate schools for all; and dissection of Soviet philosophy.

► THE NATIONAL militia plan for the armed forces, proposed by President James B. Conant of Harvard in his book, *EDUCATION IN A DIVIDED WORLD*, published by the Harvard University Press (\$3) will be received in educational circles as a means of maintaining military strength without disrupting college education.

President Conant suggests enrolling every physically fit boy at 18 or high school graduation for a period of 10 years in the National Guard. Summer camps and evening drill would provide the military training. The boys would have uninterrupted college opportunity that would furnish the specialists in peace and war.

Although this plan is not supported by the military men, educational authorities have been opposed to the wrecking of the college year by even six months of training.

The present draft will not affect college students until next June, as any called will be deferred until the end of a college year.

In the long run, President Conant, himself a chemist, warned against educating more doctors, lawyers, engineers, scientists and college professors than our economy can support. He fears that such people, if unemployed, as in pre-war Germany, might become frustrated individuals who would lead anti-democratic movements.

## Primary Education Need

The number one educational need of the present, in President Conant's judgment, is "an understanding of American democratic society and its historical goals, and a dissection of Soviet philosophy and an exposure of its methods."

The necessity of equality of opportunity for youth of each succeeding generation is emphasized by President Conant, who assumes an armed truce until at least the middle fifties and a divided world for a long time to come.

He wants state tax money used to bolster up the schools in parts of the state where local funds do not provide adequate schools. He wants federal aid to education along the lines proposed by Senator Taft. He wants discovery of the various talents in youth early so they can be cultivated. He wants two-year colleges added to local school systems to provide vocational training and training in citizenship at home. He wants a college degree awarded at the end of these two years. He wants some federal scholarships for the best qualified youths in the four-year professional colleges.

"As a nation, we are a long, long way from equality of educational opportunity."

Mr. Conant reports. "An examination of various localities shows that already in the United States there are wide variations. Instances of very restricted opportunity and instances of very wide opportunity for children of the lower income groups may be easily discovered."

Not only does family income affect a child's schooling, but also the location of his home. Youths in cities, where universities are located, he shows, have a much better chance of continuing their education than youths in rural communities, who must go away to college.

Mr. Conant cites estimates that "as many promising boys and girls fail to go to college for economic reasons as the number who now enter," and he estimates that "somewhat less than one-fourth of the male white population between the ages of 10 and 16 now lives in urban areas within convenient commuting distance of a satisfactory university."

"To the extent that educational opportunity is determined by geography or by family status," he warns, "the increased

importance of formal education in modern America tends to make for social stratification.

"When education more advanced than the elementary schools was hardly required except for a few professions, a man might make a career for himself without benefit of formal learning," he points out; but today "even a man with great native ability whose education stops at the end of grammar school has many doors of opportunity firmly closed."

Of America, Mr. Conant says: "Our fitness to survive the Russian challenge clearly depends on many factors, but it depends primarily on a vigorous demonstration of the vitality of our own beliefs in democracy and freedom."

## Scientific Method

In his own field of study, Mr. Conant suggests that teachers "reject the extravagant claims for the scientific method as a modern Aladdin's lamp and question the validity of the assumption that the study of physics trains the mind of the future statesman."

Students should be given "the conditions of scientific inquiry, that is to say, the nature of the assumptions about the external world which are essentially those of common sense."

"Then if we seek to spread more widely the desire to examine facts without prejudice and to glorify the bold and impartial inquirers of the 20th century, we should go to other fields than natural science. . . ."



**NEW RESEARCH CENTER**—One of the world's largest petroleum research centers, just opened, was built for the Standard Oil Development Company. The building shown here from the air is the first unit of the center, located at Linden, New Jersey, which will house approximately 650 chemists, engineers and research assistants in its 80 laboratories. In the background are oil storage tanks.