What Makes Up My Mind on International Questions

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Five Outlines
for Leaders and Members
of Discussion Groups

THE INQUIRY
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INTRODUCTION

"*Yes, I know it is all very important; but what can I do* about it?" And the average citizen is by no means always flippant as he makes this remark. He finds present-day international questions very numerous and extremely complicated. Quite often he sees in them no connection with his daily life. Moreover, even if he masters the essential information about one of them, he is not at all sure how much his hard earned facts will help him face the next international situation when it arises.

This booklet contains merely the first notes on a number of experiments conducted to find out whether groups of ordinary people in their approach to international questions cannot make more effective use of their own experience and interests. The first move was the organizing by about twenty interested people of a discussion on "What Makes up My Mind on International Questions?" A number of these people in turn repeated the experiment, enlisting the aid of industrial workers, college students, and members of various religious and community organizations. The following outlines are based on the reports of those discussions, and the illustrations included are for the most part taken from examples supplied in their course.

The methods employed in these outlines call for a kind of mental inventory in which many apparently trivial items are listed. But, if the things which people do and read and hear in their own communities affect what those people think about international affairs, it seems reasonable to assume that the recognition of those influences is a step toward their control. *The Inquiry* hopes that in the identification of some of these factors is at least the beginning to the answer of the citizen's question, "What can I do about it?"

TO THE LEADER

A Study of Attitudes, not of Subjects

In order to save prospective members of your group from disappointment, you will do well to make clear at the beginning that this set of outlines does not call for detailed study of any one international question. On the other hand, the mapping of areas of interest in such a discussion as No. II is a most helpful approach to the study of some specific international question. Such a study, carried on with frequent checks to note the sources of information and of opinions, affords one way of putting to immediate use some of the discoveries made in these discussions on *attitudes.*

Learning from Experience

It is assumed throughout this pamphlet that the process of widening our education about international questions is based on the same principles as that of learning anything else. As a general background for all the discussions, you will find useful the two outlines in Appendix II, pp. 85, 88: *Learning From Experience,* and *A Complete Educative Process.*

Professor Kilpatrick, in his "Foundations of Method," points out that in learning anything new we go through the following stages:

a. Linking it with our own experience;
b. Facing it as a problem;
c. Relating it to wider facts and interests;
d. Acting upon it with satisfaction.

One of the chief weaknesses of the many attempts at international education through speeches (spoken or written) is that they offer the hearers or readers little oppor-

tunity for the taking of the important fourth step. Emphasize to your group this necessity for action; and help them plan, at the end of the very first session, some small project. These first moves should not be too difficult, and should be of the type that can be completed within a few days. (For example, Nos. 2a, and 3, pp. 80, 81.) This early completion of the first undertakings will probably encourage the members to further effort and will also make their findings available for analysis in later discussions.

Organizing the Group

The most rewarding discussion usually takes place in a session of not less than an hour and a half, with not more than twenty people taking part. In deciding whom to include, remember that the whole course is built around the idea that back of the relations between nations are those between people. Try to include several persons of foreign birth, but with a variety of background and interests. For Discussion IV you will need the help of one or more additional people to serve as sources of information about the attitudes of the foreign-born in your community.

Planning the Discussion Hour[1]

(For general reading see Helpful Books, p. 90)

As you read through each chapter in advance of the session, check the questions and illustrations that seem most likely to be useful. Do not plan to ask during the hour every question in the text; it is enough if the discussion advances through the main stages listed in the brief outline at the end of each chapter. Do not hurry good discussion for the sake of completing the outline.

[1] Additional copies of the three tests used in these discussions may be had for 50 cents a dozen sets, or 30 cents a half-dozen, from the Association Press, 347 Madison Avenue, New York, and the Womans Press, 600 Lexington Avenue, New York.

Division of Work

At the beginning of the first session have the group elect a secretary to keep a record for future reference. From time to time you may also wish to call upon the secretary or another person in the group to help summarize the discussion. An occasional call of this kind serves to remind the group that you are merely acting as their representative.

Avoid Emotional Explosions

When you are examining situations deeply charged with feeling, carry on the discussion in the third person. Ask "What has happened to someone you know?" rather than "What has happened to you?". If, in spite of your precautions, members fall into contentious arguments, ask "Why do some people think. . . . ?" and introduce an opinion on the other side. In doing this be sure to make it clear that the opinion introduced is not your own.

How to Summarize

As you listen, keep mental notes of the discussion in terms of differences in *fact* and in *philosophy*; and of possible grounds for agreement. The moment you begin to hear the same ideas repeated, begin your summary. Once the main issue seems clear, ask "Is the question we are facing this . . . . ?" Remember that the summary may recognize *agreement* or *difference*.

Don't Talk Too Much

Remember that the most important part of your task is to get expression from the group of the widest possible variety of opinion on the situation under discussion. You should not hesitate to call attention to phases of a question which would otherwise be overlooked; but if you speak after every other person you limit the opportunities of

members to get the benefit which comes from taking part. Above all, never argue with a speaker about a statement you do not like. Your job is to listen, to summarize what you have heard, and to invite the group to modify your summary.[1]

Of the people who have taken part in the preliminary discussions from which this booklet has been compiled, many have expressed their need for suggestions to help them in further experimentation. Will you join in this coöperative study by sending us an account of what happens in your group? Please include interesting examples of attitudes different from those quoted in this booklet, instances of how people have changed their attitudes; and detailed descriptions of projects undertaken, with reports of failures as well as successes in carrying them out. Send reports to

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[1] For a more adequate treatment of the leader's part, *see* "Creative Discussion," published by The Inquiry, 129 E. 52nd Street, New York, N. Y. (Price, 35 cents.)

DISCUSSION I

Where Do We Get the Pictures in Our Heads?

[For the sake of clearness, the text throughout the discussions is addressed to the leader. Each member of the group, however, should be provided with a copy of this booklet, in order that each chapter may be read in advance. For additional copies of the tests used, see footnote, page 8.]

There is an old proverb which cautions us against mentioning the word "rope" to the family of a man who has been hanged. Each of us who, at one time or another, has opened his mouth only to "put his foot in it" knows all too well the power of a single word in the wrong place to stir up people's feelings by recalling unpleasant memories, and to create all sorts of obstacles to action which are as real as they are unexpected. The word in itself may be perfectly harmless; "rope" might be an excellent word to mention to a member of a successful tug-of-war team, or to a man who has just completed a profitable deal in jute. Everything depends upon what the word recalls in the mind of the person who hears it.

In this series of discussions your group are trying to find out, by comparing their own experiences, where these "pictures in our heads" come from and how they tend to affect thought and action in one particular area—that of international relations. In order that it may be clearly understood just what is meant by these "pictures," it may be well to examine several which have been described by members of other groups. Here are two which offer interesting contrasts:

(1)

When the Prince of Wales is mentioned, there flashes into my mind a picture of a young man sitting on the ground, very undignified and with a blank expression on his face. He is

dressed in a riding suit, and has a whip in his hand. This picture was taken right after a rather gentle horse had thrown him. Another picture that I connect with the Prince of Wales is one in which he is talking to some ladies, and has on a sloppy hat and unpressed pants. He is standing very awkwardly. These two pictures, and the fact that he has had so many love affairs and is not married, have caused me to have a feeling of contempt for him.

(2)

In my childhood the Prince of Wales meant only the person who succeeded the King of England to the throne. As my experiences were enlarged I began to picture him in person as a bashful young man who did not call for sympathy, but was rather ridiculous or funny. Now when I think of him I picture an immaculately dressed fellow, good-natured, comparatively shy, and above all good-humored. The newspapers have probably influenced me in my associations in thinking of a young man who isn't getting married every time it is hoped he will, and in my picturing of a young man flying through the air after being unseated by his horse.

From what sources did these two people get their pictures?

To what degree would these pictures tend to color other news which these two persons might read about the Prince?

To what extent would these pictures be likely to affect the opinions of these persons about a speech made by the Prince—for example, one made by him before the British-American Club on the subject of friendly relations between Great Britain and the United States?

Here are two more instances for comparison:

(1)

During the World War and afterwards many vivid stories were published about the cruel treatment of the Armenians by the Turks. The Turks would make Armenian children walk miles barefoot in the snow, whipping them as they went. If the Armenians accepted the religion of the Turks, they would be released; but if not, they were tortured. Every time some

one mentions the name "Turk" these pictures are recalled to mind.

(2)

Armenian has only one effect on my mind. It always makes me think of beggars. The only time I ever hear about Armenians is when there is some drive to collect money or provisions for them. In reality they are no worse than many other people. But nevertheless the thought of them is not pleasant.

Where did these pictures come from?

How would they tend to affect the different degrees of enthusiasm with which the two people who described them might undertake to organize a local committee for the Near East Relief?

How far would the dislike of the Turks indicated in the example just cited be likely to affect the opinion of the person who told of his feeling on such a question as to whether the United States should accept the new Turkish laws limiting the rights of foreigners in Turkey?

The purpose of our examining these attitudes, or tendencies to action, is to help us decide which of those we find within the group are likely to lead to better international relations; and which, when held by many people, are likely to cause trouble. If the series of discussions is to be successful, it ought to lead to projects for strengthening those attitudes which the group think make for peace; and for transforming as far as possible those which make for misunderstanding and war.

A convenient device for getting out into the open the pictures within the group is the word test below. The marking of the papers and the show of hands called for from time to time give shy members an easy way of taking part from the very beginning of the hour. The test looks like a game and should be carried out as far as possible in the spirit of one.

TEST I

(ADAPTED FROM TESTS IN GOODWIN B. WATSON'S "THE MEASUREMENT OF FAIR-MINDEDNESS"—*See* HELPFUL BOOKS)

Directions: A. Read through the words and phrases listed below. Consider each one not more than five seconds. If it calls up a disagreeable association, cross it out. You may cross out many or few words. Work as rapidly as you can, but be sure you cross out every word which is more annoying than pleasing, more antagonizing than appealing, more distasteful than attractive.

1. Nordic
2. Disarmament
3. Jew
4. Prince of Wales
5. Immigrant
6. Protestant
7. Pole
8. World Court
9. Ku Klux Klan
10. My Country Right or Wrong
11. Roman Catholic
12. 100 per cent. American
13. Mohammedan
14. Socialist
15. Nationalism
16. Propaganda
17. America First
18. American Legion
19. Made in Germany
20. Pacifist
21. Monroe Doctrine
22. Defense Day
23. Foreigner
24. League of Nations
25. Japanese
26. Chinese
27. Reserve Officers' Training Corps
28. Quaker
29. West Point
30. Radical
31. Non-resistance
32. Independence of Phillipines
33. Treaty of Versailles
34. War Veterans
35. National Security League
36. Protective Tariff
37. Turk
38. Armenian
39. Slav
40. Mexican
41. Fascisti
42. Russian
43. French
44. Italian
45. Greek Catholic
46. Irish
47. Mussolini
48. Preparedness
49. German
50. Patriot

B. Now read through the list again, placing a cross opposite each word which calls up a pleasant association.

Materials Required: One copy of the test and a pencil for each member of the group; and a blackboard. It will save time in scoring the results of the test if in advance of the session the words are copied on the blackboard.

Distribution of Test: Hand a copy of the test to each member immediately before it is to be marked. Read aloud the instructions at the top of the page. Be sure that each person understands what is to be done. Have the group work quickly.

After the marking, ask some member to select one word; and find out by a show of hands how many members crossed it out as "unpleasant;" and how many marked it "pleasant." (Some, to whom the word was "neutral," will not have marked it at all.) After you have taken the vote ask for a volunteer to describe a picture which the word called up. If the members are hesitant or uncertain as to how to express themselves, illustrations such as those about the Prince of Wales and the Armenians, quoted above, may be helpful. It is necessary, however, to guard against letting examples from this booklet take too prominent a place. Illustrations quoted may be helpful for comparison and to round out the necessarily limited experience of a small group; but the purpose of these discussions is to help the members to examine *their own* experiences. To this end it is useful to draw out incidents which show influences different from those described in illustrations read to the group.

Encourage the telling of everyday happenings which have been responsible for the creation of likes and dislikes. People often find out through an exchange of similar experiences that they have become biased against a whole nation because of a single person with offensive habits. For example:

When the word "foreigner" is mentioned, I think of limburger cheese. In grade school, an Italian girl of respectable

family sat opposite me. During the school hours she was continually eating limburger cheese, keeping a great smelly piece in her desk. I was talking about it to some friends. They laughed and sneered—"Oh, well, she's a foreigner."

As one incident calls out another, members come to see that other people, too, are affected deeply by small happenings. On the other hand, two members may note that through different ordinary experiences they come to quite different attitudes toward the same nationality. It is this realization of the frequently casual way in which we have come by our mental pictures that the first steps are taken toward overhauling our way of looking at other peoples. It will probably turn out that some one in the group, because of a happy personal experience, has a favorable reaction toward a group generally disliked. This may set the group thinking about possible contacts they can make in the hope of securing the same results. Here, then, almost at the outset, we have a situation for a possible experiment between sessions: the deliberate search for pleasant contacts with members of a group in the community that is generally disliked.

A question to be asked after each description is: *Where did the picture come from?* The group will be able to understand the experience of any member only if this information is given concretely. Ask "Just what *happened?*" "What was the name of the book?" "What newspaper?" "Did the picture come from a headline, the rotogravure section, an editorial, a cartoon, a comic strip?" (The secretary of the group should keep full notes of this information for use in later sessions.)

If you cannot call for a vote on all the words in the list you will save time and kindle interest by letting members call out the words on which they would especially like to have a vote taken. It is well to get discussion on the words one at a time; or, at the most, on a small group of related words.