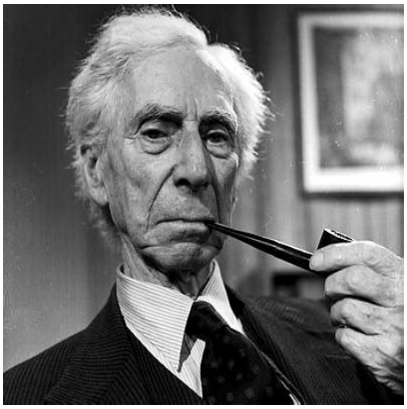

Bertrand Russel on education and freedom of thought

Description

Free thought and official propaganda : delivered at South Place Institute on March 24, 1922

“Manwhile the whole machinery of the State, in all the different countries, is turned on to making defenceless children believe absurd propositions the effect of which is to make them willing to die in defence of sinister interests under the impression that they are fighting for truth and right. This is only one of countless ways in which education is designed, not to give true knowledge, but to make the people pliable to the will of their masters. Without an elaborate system of deceit in the elementary schools it would be impossible to preserve the camouflage of democracy.
… It must not be supposed that the officials in charge of education desire the young to become educated. On the contrary, their problem is to impart information without imparting intelli- gence. Education should have two objects : first, to give definite knowledge — reading and writing, languages and mathematics, and so on ; secondly, to create those mental habits which will enable people to acquire knowledge and form sound judgments for themselves. The first of these we may call information, the second intelligence. The utility of information is admitted practically as well as theoretically ; without a literate population a modern State is impossible. But the utility of intelligence is admitted only theoretically, not practically ; it is not desired that ordinary people should think for themselves, because it is felt that people who think for themselves are awkward to manage and cause administrative difficulties. Only the guardians, in Plato‘s language, are to think ; the rest are to obey, or to follow leaders like a herd of sheep. This doctrine, often unconsciously, has survived the introduction of political democracy, and has radically vitiated all national systems of education.

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