

PM

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 1945

What About Japanese Youth?



Schooldays are here again, in New York and all over America. This is the first time in six years that the schools have opened on a world not at war. It is the first time in 10 years or more that they have opened on a world not living under the shadow of fascist domination.

It is good to see the youngsters in the Autumn sunshine trooping again into city schools and village schoolrooms, learning the old and dreaming of the new. As I watch them I reflect that what goes today into the making of their heart and will and mind is what will go tomorrow into the making of American democracy. More than the atom bomb, more than big navy and far-flung army, more than world trade, the schools are the link between America and its destiny.

Halfway Across the World

But as I watch these youngsters, my mind cannot help jumping to the children of another nation, halfway across the world. I mean the Japanese children. Back in March, when Japan was preparing for its worst blows, it was announced that all schools would close down for a year: the children were needed in the fields and in civilian defense work. Now they will get a chance to open again, and in Japan too fathers and mothers will be sending their children to school.

What will they be taught and by whom? I find that a more serious question than the question of whether Tojo dies or survives, whether he had time to commit hara-kiri or muffed it. I find it more serious even—and I say this very deliberately—than the question of who goes or doesn't go on the list of war criminals. It is important to punish the men who plunged the Japan of yesterday into the war just ended. But it is even more

2 *Japanese Youth*

important to keep the Japan of tomorrow from again spearheading a Far Eastern war.

The Japanese youth are the key to Japan's future. There were 12,000,000 of them in the elementary schools before the war, dressed in school uniforms, bowing before the Emperor's portrait every day on entering and leaving. Before a child started school, at 6, he was taken to a shrine of the State Shinto, presided over by a priest who was an official of the Emperor. He was given a speech about loyalty to the Emperor, and a book of ethics put out by the Emperor's Dept. of Education. Every day in school, while he gets a smattering of the three *Rs* as our children do, the real purpose is to make him an unwavering unquestioning servant of the Emperor and the ruling gang.

Hammering It In

He is told (I take this from John F. Embree's excellent and sober book, *The Japanese Nation*): "We are a peculiar people—descended from the gods and of superior flesh." He is told every day that there is but one Way, and that is the Way of the Imperial Ancestors. He is told that it is "infallible for all ages and true in all places." Every day obedience to the Emperor is hammered into his mind, and the duty of sacrificing himself for the Emperor is hammered into his will.

He becomes not a thinking person but a machine—a robot who looks like a man. The values taught him are feudal values. But from the time he is a baby, like the one whose picture we print on Page 1, these values are linked with a jingoistic nationalism, with a racist fascism. And as he grows up, the feudal idea is taught to shoot and kill. The values taught him are feudal and fascist values, but the weapons given him are modern weapons. This is the combination that produced the suicide-squadrons of the *Kamikaze*.

These are the youth we have on our hands in Japan. They are the youth whose minds form the real battlefield of today, whose hearts are the high and desperate stakes for which we must play.

I ask again, what will they be taught and who will teach them? Under Gen. MacArthur's large directives, I gather that we are going to keep our hands off the schools, leaving the youth in the hands of those who have taught them



Teaching the Feudal Idea to Shoot

Japanese Youth

before. The Emperor is still the portrait before which they bow. The State Shinto is still there, and the linkage between it and the school system is still the crucial thing about Japanese education. Whatever outward school reforms the Japanese may promise, the inner spirit will remain so long as the ruling gang remains.

We must ask ourselves how we can ever expect a democratic Japan while the school system remains feudal and fascist, and how we can expect a free Japan while the school system brings up suicide-fanatics and robots.

Will Toward Democracy

I don't say that the answer is for the American Army of Occupation to take over the school system, and run it. That would be absurd. The Japanese schools can be run only by Japanese. But if Japan is ever to become a democracy, the schools must be run by those who have the will toward making it a democracy. That is impossible so long as the Emperor and the State Shinto remain, and so long as the ruling gang uses them to bolster its power.

Only a revolution in education will ever produce a democratic Japan that stays democratic. And only a sweeping political revolution will ever produce a revolution in education.—MAX LERNER

