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RELEASE: OCTOBER 28, 1983

A CRUEL HALLOWEEN PRANK

The cruelest Halloween trick played on children this year is the attempt to psyche them out with scary courses, lectures, books, and games about nuclear war. This prank isn't fun and it isn't funny; it's deadly serious and depressing.

The promoters of the nuclear war courses pretend that they are simply responding to children's fears about war. On the contrary, the children only started worrying about nuclear war after adults told them to be afraid.

The curricula on nuclear war now being forced down the throats of unsuspecting children in many schools this fall were recently evaluated by one of the country's foremost psychiatrists. He is Dr. Harold M. Voth, chief of staff at the Veterans Medical Center in Topeka, Kansas, a clinical professor of psychiatry at the University of Kansas, and a faculty member of the Menninger School of Psychiatry in Topeka.

It is human nature to try to arrive at solutions when presented with problems. But, Dr. Voth says, "the end point of all these exercises is a blind alley, for there are no solutions for the young to find. The sense of frustration can only be great for those who take these curricula seriously."

"When there are no solutions to life's problems," he continues, "despair eventually follows, and then comes a sense of defeat and depression. I can see no other end point for those youngsters who are exposed to this material."

The lessons and exercises in the curricula are often extremely complex, and they imply that the bomb will eventually go off. Dr. Voth warns that "children should not be subjected to such nonsense. Such exercises will seriously aggravate the sense of despair many young people already feel about life."

Dr. Voth concludes: "Bluntly put, these programs can only scare the wits out of young people, challenge them with unsolvable problems, and ultimately lead to a sense of hopelessness about the future."

Of course, Dr. Voth doesn't deny the nuclear threat to mankind. But, he says, "to

expose millions of children to the horrors of a nuclear war, thereby promoting a massive response of resignation, defeatism, and reaction formation, can only substantially add to the devitalization of our nation."

Often the simplest truths are the most obvious. "If the world's greatest statesmen are having difficulty solving international relations and removing the threat of nuclear destruction," Dr. Voth says, "how in the world can people in their right minds expect children to make constructive contributions to these grave issues, especially when such a high percentage of those children are already troubled within themselves and do not live within a solid, secure home?"

He points out that even "the most psychologically secure child, from the most stable and secure family, is no match for the overwhelming issues being presented to them. Even the healthiest children are also very likely to react with despair."

Based on his 30 professional years in psychiatry, Dr. Voth states unequivocally that "personality factors have a powerful impact on career choices. A special kind of personality is required to be able to stand firm during tough negotiating processes."

The nuclear war courses tell the children in a hundred overt and subliminal ways that military people are bad, that the Pentagon is occupied by greedy, power-hungry monsters, and that these elements should be removed from our society. The children are led to believe that, "if we will lay down our arms, the world will be a safe place in which to live and prosper." Dr. Voth reminds us that "perhaps the world will some day be such a place, but it is not such a place now."

Dr. Voth believes that our nuclear dilemma will eventually be solved. He does not think we will blow each other up. But, he says, "one thing I know for certain is that the negotiations which will eventually lead to this happy day will never succeed if we populate our nation with devitalized people and fill them with despair about the future during their developmental years."

Dr. Voth urges that children "learn the basics first and then the more difficult fields later, after having achieved the maturity to comprehend them. Then, as adults, they will possess sufficient courage and knowledge of the human condition to enter into negotiations with other nations -- not from a position of passivity, despair, fear and trembling, but from a position of courage, reason, strength, competence, and hope for the future."