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NAZIONE UNICA - Maria Montessori, lecture excerpts (Copenhagen 1937, San Remo 1949)

In the last years technical and scientific progress has brought about profound changes in environments and living conditions. The obstacles, made by mountains or by wide expanses of oceans and seas which separated nations in time and space no longer exist. Today the rapidity of means of communication has notably reduced, if not wiped-out, the validity of these defenses. The possibility of exchanging the raw materials, merchandise, and various products of our civilization has been simplified.

The continuous mutual dependence for the things from which we live and which we need excludes any possibility of living for oneself alone. No one can deny that if we have food to nourish us, clothes to cover us, and houses to give us shelter, it is because other people procure all these things for us by their labor. Hence it is men who keep other men alive; each lives because of the life of the other and each contributes to the life of all. Certainly this is not inspired by a spirit of sacrifice - but it is done. Man depends entirely upon man.

From all sides we get proof that the whole of humanity is really united today, both economically, materially, and intellectually; so united that it can be considered to form one nation.

All the countries on earth are joined by every sort of relationship; they are so dependent on one another that they do form one whole. Even modern wars have shown this: the victors today are not made richer by their victory; on the contrary, the vanquished become an extra liability for them.

Why then, the continued claim that men must be educated to the idea of creating one universal nation? This union already exists in the world! What should be done, therefore, is to make men aware of this reality and replace the idea of the need to bring union among men, with the positiveness of real and profound existence of these bonds of interdependence and social solidarity between the peoples of the world. It is a question, then, of substantially changing the outlook on these relations and of influencing men's conscience to acquire new ideals, those of fighting against indifference and incomprehension and of assuming a feeling of gratitude towards humanity who work for us.

Today this preparation is missing. The communion and the union already existing among all men is therefore not something directly willed. It has come by chance as a consequence of discoveries and inventions and the multiplication of machines, so that while all the interests of men have gradually united, great lacunes have been left in the physical fields: errors that separate men from men which education must correct.

Man, who today is being dragged by these errors must become the master of the time in which he lives. It is evident that if men were prepared for the conditions of life of their present instead of being dragged by events they could direct them.

When will this occur, instead of being frightened as today, humanity will become strong, brave and able to organize itself for the full attainment of its goals.

There are two realities of which mankind could take advantage for a conscious organization: humanity already united, and the new child. The new child we can have by beginning to educate at the point when men are not yet anything; when, spiritually, they are naught, when different languages and contrasting

ideas are not yet formed, when they are not yet deaf to each other. At the point where there are infinite latent possibilities - both to separate and to unite the men of the future.

These must be translated to the child not as merely knowledge but by making them available in the environment in a form accessible to the very refined avid and rigidly specialized sensitivities of infancy, so that the child can absorb and 'incarnate' them, as he does language. In this way children will not learn them but make them an integral part of their character.

In this way the children we saw revealing themselves in our schools will lead us to a better humanity. They will be the new race of man which will show us the new world.