

Ernst Papanek

Ernst was a friend of so many people, in so many places, that one can truly say that he was a friend of all the people of our earth. Whoever met him felt the warmth of his personality and his human interest, which made everyone love him, and induced so many to live up to their best.

I first met Ernst about 1918, when World War I was drawing to an end. He was already then demonstrating his talent for leadership. During the desperate years in Austria after World War I, he started organizations to help needy children and the aged. It was also about this time that he became one of the leaders of the Liberal Youth Movement, from which many lasting friendships sprang. Thus, among the many letters received by Ernst's widow, Helene, after his death, was one from the world-famous pianist and humanitarian, Rudolf Serkin, in which he mentions how much Ernst has given him in his life. "His influence on my development, my thinking and feeling, was already from my earliest years important and decisive... Whenever we met, it was a joyous time for me." This letter from one of Ernst's friends speaks for all of us who have had the privilege of knowing him, and who will always remember him.

In the following years, Ernst became Chairman of the Socialist Youth Movement, and a high official of the Austrian Government. And as President of one of the Viennese School Board Committees, he exerted an important influence on progressive education, both at home and abroad. He became a frequent speaker at national and international conferences on education, wrote many scientific papers in this field, and soon became internationally recognized.

Ernst had to leave Austria in 1934, while trying to counteract the Fascist tendencies of the government that preceded the take-over of Hitler in 1938. He was even jailed in Switzerland for two weeks, under suspicion of "conspiring against the Austrian government." In 1938, he was joined by his wife and two sons in France, where he helped hundreds of orphaned children to find a haven and refuge from the advancing Nazis. After his arrival in this country in 1940, Ernst, a long-time student and friend of Alfred Adler, continued to follow the tenets of Individual Psychology in all his activities, through his outstanding social interest and optimism; in his work at the Alfred Adler Mental Hygiene Clinic; as lecturer at the Alfred Adler Institute, in collaboration with his wife, Dr. Helene Papanek; as faculty member of other institutions of higher learning, such as Queens College; and as administrator of social agencies, such as the Wiltwyck School for Boys.

In closing, I should like to quote the epitaph the German poet, Wilhelm Busch wrote for himself. It summarizes Ernst's contribution to the lives of all of us. The English version would be:

Hate, tedious and futile, will be vanquished.
In the book of life, only love remains.
Whether we are left with a minus or a plus,
The end will show.

And the German original:

Hass, weil muhsam und vergebens,
Wird vom Leben abgeschrieben.
Positiv in Buch des Lebens
Bleibt erhalten nur das Lieben.
Ob ein Minus oder Plus uns geblieben
Zeigt der Schluss.

Our love for Ernst will remain with us and goes out to his loving and beloved family as long as we live.

Alexandra Adler, M.D.