BACKGROUND FOR AGRONOMY

John D. Pendleton

At the present time, scanty information from the Pentagon, Capitol Hill, the State Department, and the White House bring such words as mega deaths (deaths measured in millions) and mega tons (million tons of TNT) to describe the effect of nuclear fission and fusion bombs. The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists puts the hour as “five minutes to midnight.”

Demands of the times—technical, economic, social, political, and military—have given rise to an ever increasing chorus of voices offering plans for or criticism of the education of youth. Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute has re-organized its operations to “develop programs for producing graduates who can cope with the increased responsibilities of the twentieth century”. Dean Paul E. Hemke states that the world situation requires that we make sure our curricula contain no subject that can be eliminated or modified to make room for another subject that is more needed.

There is a general feeling that educational objectives and techniques in the United States need some revision. Emphasizing the ferment of ideas concerning present day education were the thoughts expressed at a conference at St. John’s College at Annapolis, Md., devoted to the role of the secondary school and the college in liberal education. Some of them are as follows:

Too many schools were said to be fear-ridden and failing to teach students to think. Failure to conform even to stereotypes was declared to have resulted in individuals being branded as eggheads and brain trusters. It was stated that the attitude has been that good strong C students rather than A students were to be sought after even as teachers; business men and employers talk about the value of college diplomas, but still avoid Phi Beta Kappa graduates.

Environment for Learning

An educational problem that has received considerable attention rather recently is that of the proper environment for learning. For example, a committee sponsored by the Public Schools of Detroit and Wayne University recently issued a report on the importance of a pupil’s being at ease, loved, and made aware of his personal worth in the school room even if such conditions did not exist elsewhere. This problem seems small compared with what to teach. Surveys to find what should be taught for the needs of the community often come up with recommendations for more vocational courses for students not going to college and to meet employment requirements.

It is not only high school students who suffer from the trend to vocational studies. Many colleges are adding more technical subjects in an attempt to keep students abreast of new developments.