



RESPECT FOR AUTHORITY - WHY LACKING?

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“The defiance of established authority, religious and secular, social and political, as a worldwide phenomenon may well one day be accounted the outstanding event of the last decade.”

YEARS have passed since the 1960's, the decade here referred to by the historian and philosopher Hannah Arendt. Today, the tide of disrespect for authority is running stronger than ever.

For example, a recent report in *The Times* of London states: “Some parents refuse to accept the authority of the teacher over their child and when attempts are made to discipline their child they complain.” Frequently, when their children are disciplined at school, parents turn up there not just to threaten the teachers but to attack them.

A spokesman for the National Association of Head Teachers in Britain is quoted as stating: “The public are saying ‘I have got rights,’ rather than ‘I have got responsibilities.’” Besides failing to instill in their children a healthy respect for authority, some parents do not correct their youngsters—and refuse to let others do so. Children claiming their “rights” are allowed to flout the authority of both parents and teachers, and the result is predictable—“a new generation with no respect for authority and little idea of right and wrong,” writes columnist Margarette Driscoll.

Time magazine in its article “Lost Generation” pinpointed the disillusionment of many Russian youths by quoting a top rapper who said: “How can anyone born into this world, where nothing lasts for long and nothing is fair, have faith in society?” Sociologist Mikhail Topalov endorsed this sentiment: “These kids are not stupid. They’ve seen their parents lied to by the state, they’ve seen them lose their savings and their jobs. Can we expect them to respect authority?”

It would be wrong to conclude, however, that distrust of authority characterizes only the younger generation. Today, people of all ages view any kind of authority with distrust, even contempt. Does this mean that no authority can be trusted? If exercised properly, authority, defined as “the power or right to control, judge, or prohibit the actions of others,” can be a force for good. It can be of benefit both to individuals and to the community. The following article will consider how this is so.

