

THE LISTENING POST

Sound the Alert

MUCH HAS BEEN WRITTEN and said recently concerning the apparently awakened interest of citizens in government. Such statements as: "Citizens are more widely and directly interested in government today than ever before," and, "Widening interest and expanding participation on the part of citizens in government is a wholesome symbol of dynamic democracy," are evidences of a feeling that at least we are beginning to assume the duties, obligations, and responsibilities of citizenship. Let us hope fervently that such is the case and that we are not mistaking an upsurge of individual interest in "rights, privileges, and opportunities" under democracy for the acceptance of true citizenship responsibility.

In the beginning the framers of democratic governmental structure in this country conceived and stated in memorable terms the ideal of human equity in rights, privileges, and opportunities, but at the same time they implied strongly a corresponding equity in duties, obligations, and responsibilities. The first equity is but an empty gesture without common and universal acceptance of the latter. The general and widespread reluctance of the American people to accept equity in duties, obligations, and responsibilities of citizenship, while at the same time tenaciously clinging to the equity in rights, privileges, and opportunities of democracy has been largely responsible for most of the major problems of American life.

We enthusiastically subscribe to the belief that "all men are created free and equal" yet we are little concerned about the vast inequalities in civic, social, and economic opportunity that seem to be multiplying in this country. Why have we been able to secure so little legislation aimed at the removal of these inequalities?

Certainly one answer is found in the fact that those who exploit the advantages of democratic government through the exercise of their rights, privileges, and

opportunities, maintain consistently a far more active participation in the shaping of legislation at all levels of government than do those who are charged with the perpetuation of democracy through education. Every selfish group of citizens in America knows how to exert pressure on legislative bodies and most of them have no scruples against using the "lobby" in the very ugliest sense of the word. Many of them are able to get their members to become informed adequately about all legislation that has any relationship to their economic welfare, and all of them seem to be able to get their membership to express itself vociferously at the polls.

This condition is a sweeping condemnation of education and of the teaching profession particularly. Teacher organizations have pride in their ethical approach to legislation, which is as it should be, but too many teachers do not exercise the right to vote. All too often those who do vote know so little about the candidate or the issues that their vote is ineffectual in terms of the educational welfare of the country. The members of the teaching profession have been derelict in their duty to the youth of America in their passive and apathetic approach to the problem of influencing and shaping worthwhile legislation. They are reluctant to join into organized groups for the purpose of furthering sound educational legislation; they are not sufficiently well-informed about legislative matters to serve as educators of future citizens or as community leaders; and they know less about legislative matters, educational as well as general, than the members of any other similar profession. This may well be one of the reasons why the teaching profession, although the oldest and by far the largest of all professions, is also the least respected.

Until the individual teacher assumes fully the duties, obligations, and responsibilities inherent in true democratic citi-

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hypotheses, and reaching conclusions which serve as a basis of action. The answer a pupil reaches is not of major concern to the school. If skill in critical and constructive thinking is developed, the pupil's conclusions will change as he comes into contact with new data through additional experience.

To follow the third course, and the writer believes it is the one we should accept, means that study aids treating controversial areas must be secured. Where? They may be secured from partisan groups supporting various sides of a controversy. Biased presentations are valuable because they can be used to help pupils develop skill in analyzing propaganda. But they are not enough. Many teachers are unwilling to use them and many communities will restrict the points of view represented. Pupils also need objective statements. School publishers can fill a real need by preparing two types of materials. One type presents the issue in a way that arouses interest. *Kingsblood Royal* and the film excerpts selected by the Commission on Human Relations of the Progressive Education Association are good examples. After the problem has been defined, unbiased information is needed for class use. Study sources like the *Public Affairs* pamphlets and *Building America* should be available in many fields at all maturity levels.

If schools are to teach pupils to think for themselves, they need materials that

help pupils explore areas that are vitally important to youth, areas in which thinking is being done by adults. Youth lives in the same society, is subject to the same pressures, is challenged by the same problems. We need more publishers who are willing to attempt to help schools do successful work in controversial areas by supplying the necessary tools. But they cannot do it alone.

It is little wonder that publishers of school materials have produced less material in controversial areas than on topics on which there is uniform agreement. School textbooks, workbooks, and pamphlets are published to sell. When school people hesitate to buy and use materials on which members of the community disagree, publishers, with a few notable exceptions, center their attention on products for which the market is assured.

We have our part to play. More curriculum workers are needed who will assist publishers in defining the areas and preparing the manuscripts. More members of this association must take a definite stand that the school should devote a larger proportion of its time to examining the issues on which the community, the nation, and the world have not reached agreement.

Tools for Learning in November will be introduced by Helen F. Storen, assistant professor of education, Teachers College, Columbia University, and will deal with reading for adults.

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zanship and uses the product in shaping the destiny of American education through sound and worthwhile legislation, the teaching profession will remain of minor influence in the attainment of the great ideal of equality of opportunity for all of our citizens.—J. L. McCaskill, director, *Public Relations, Florida State University, Tallahassee.*

The Changing World

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stand convicted of treason to all mankind. To permit ourselves to remain captive to a cemetery mentality is to make this abdication and betrayal inevitable. Either we "bury" this mentality, or we shall before long be buried with it—in the blinding flash of an atomic explosion and in company with the peoples we will have betrayed.

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