

# The Listening Post

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Column Editor

*Guest of The Listening Post this month is James Pelley, Associate Superintendent of the Lincoln, Nebraska, public schools.*

## Are Teachers Citizens?

THIS IS THE TIME of general elections when Americans have the unique privilege of choosing their representatives to legislative bodies and when educators lay plans for needed legislation to bring about desired improvements in our great system of free public education.

In some enlightened spots it is generally accepted that teachers and other educational leaders should participate as full-fledged citizens in democratic processes that will shape these decisions. In all too many places, however, teachers will sit on the side lines as passive observers of the process and will play the role of second-class citizens.

We have the recent examples of Grand Prairie, Texas; Chandler, Arizona; and Kelso, Washington,<sup>1</sup> among many others, to indicate what happens to teachers when they take seriously the doctrine that all persons in a democracy have the right to participate in formulating policies and to engage in activities that determine who their elected representatives shall be. These are only instances where more courageous souls have ventured to exercise fundamental constitutional rights of citizenship. In countless other places the word is quietly given and meekly accepted that "political activity" is unbecoming to those in teaching.

<sup>1</sup> Reports of Investigations by National Commission for the Defense of Democracy Through Education, N.E.A.

So common are the abuses and examples of intimidation and reprisal that the question needs to be squarely faced by our profession: "In what ways, if any, are the citizenship rights and duties of teachers different from those of other citizens?"

## Various Opinions Exist

Almost a complete range of opinions will be found among various groups with reference to this question. Some believe that teachers and all other public employees should be excluded from any and all forms of political expression except the right of franchise. Others believe with Justice Black that "in a country whose people elect their leaders and decide great public issues the voice of none should be suppressed."

Certainly professional ethics would dictate that teachers refrain from using classroom privileges and prestige for promoting partisan politics or biased and selfish viewpoints. Neither school time, school facilities, nor school children should be used for any political purpose, regardless of how worthy the cause.

Complaints and differences of opinion do not usually arise from violation of the above principles of ethics—to which the teaching profession is thoroughly dedicated. The difficulties stem from cultural mores, found in many localities, which deny teachers full rights as citizens. Even such liberties as the

right to belong to a political party, or the right to organize and work cooperatively in support of measures and candidates for public office, are discouraged.

In spite of innumerable laws and court cases affirming these rights, teachers in many communities are effectively denied their political democracy by the influence of boards of education, pressure groups, local politicians or school administrators.

An example of this type of difficulty is the following rule which one board of education is considering with regard to personnel within the school system.

No member [of the administrative-supervisory staff, including principals] shall organize any committee, club, association or group for the purpose of furthering or defeating the appointment, nomination or election of any person or persons seeking public office; nor shall any such employee manage, conduct, solicit or receive funds for, or actively participate in, any organized campaign for or against any candidate or candidates for public office; nor shall any such employee promise, offer or threaten to participate in any organized campaign in order to encourage or discourage any person or persons in seeking public office, or in order to influence, or attempt to influence, public legislation or administration. Nothing herein shall be constructed to prohibit, restrict or interfere with the freedom of ordinary and legitimate, individual expression concerning any candidate or issue, or to interfere with the free exercise of all the rights of franchise.

### Changes Needed

Theodore C. Sorenson, editor of the *Nebraska Law Review*, recently made an extensive study of court cases in-

volving such transgressions as mentioned above and concluded that members of "our nation's school systems will continue to be only second class citizens regardless of what they teach their students about democracy, until certain changes are made."

The National Education Association has consistently held that teachers not only have the constitutional right to participate in politics, including school board elections, but that such participation is essential to good citizenship education. This policy is stated as follows:

Teachers should be good citizens. They should take part, on a basis of equality with other adults, in the civic activities of organization, discussion, voting, and the formation of public opinion. Anything which keeps teachers from being active citizens, whether it is misguided public opinion, minority pressure groups, or the inertia and timidity of teachers themselves, is a barrier to good citizenship education in the schools.<sup>2</sup>

The teaching profession, which shares responsibility for maintaining and improving our democratic way of life, has a threefold challenge:

- ¶ To live and work in faithful fulfillment of the code of professional ethics, thus protecting schools from any form of exploitation, and remembering that pupils have first call upon our time and energy.
- ¶ To slough off lethargy, timidity, inertia and whatever else may now prevent us from full participation in public affairs affecting school, community or nation.
- ¶ To resist vigorously and courageously any restrictions upon the political rights of teachers as citizens.

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

Rights which accrue through countless sacrifices and are transmitted as part of our heritage cannot be rightfully relinquished. Neither can we be complacent when liberties are violated

in other places, for there are myriad examples to demonstrate that when freedom is threatened anywhere, it is thereby threatened everywhere.—*James Pelley.*

## The Curriculum Commentator

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### Guidance and the Curriculum

ONE ASPECT OF EVALUATION with which any school must be concerned is the degree to which its students are growing in ability to direct themselves and to solve their own problems of health, social acceptability, citizenship, vocation and interpersonal and intergroup relations. In the light of this almost inescapable concern it is important to note a growing emphasis in some of the recent literature in the field of guidance and counseling. This emphasis is on the need for full cooperation between guidance and curriculum, between the counselor and the teacher.

As any discipline develops, it is bound to increase the scope of its activities and the complexities of ideas and techniques which serve it. Such is the case with guidance and counseling.

Clifford P. Froehlich's *GUIDANCE SERVICES IN SMALLER SCHOOLS* (McGraw-Hill, 1950. \$3.75) reveals through excellent illustration the many ways in which a guidance specialist may help a school to meet the needs of young people. The specialist studies individual pupils through a testing program to discover their strengths, achievements and limitations. He counsels with individuals to assist

them in making wise decisions about educational and vocational plans. He helps them solve other personal problems or refers them to agencies better qualified than the schools to deal with the issues involved. He builds programs to give information about occupations. He confers with parents and community leaders about family and community needs and opportunities. He is concerned with job placement and with follow-up studies to discover how well the school has served its students and its community. He initiates occupational surveys. He is, for most purposes, the director of research and evaluation.

### Responsibilities Are One

Many of us who are primarily concerned with teaching and the instructional program will recognize in these duties of a guidance specialist responsibilities which we have for some time regarded as the province of the entire educational personnel planning and working together. Certainly knowledge of the strengths, achievements and limitations of each pupil is essential to the success of the work of the classroom teacher. Certainly research problems, community surveys and follow-up

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