

Education—Democracy's Best Defense

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Enemies of public education and their tactics are discussed in this article, based on a speech delivered at the 1951 ASCD conference in Detroit by Richard Barnes Kennan, secretary to the Commission for the Defense of Democracy through Education, National Education Association, Washington, D. C.

THE National Commission for the Defense of Democracy through Education was organized in 1941 by the National Education Association, largely at the behest of the Department of Classroom Teachers. This "Defense Commission" was directed to (1) bring to the public better understanding of the importance of education for all; (2) defend the cause of education against unjust attacks; (3) investigate charges involving teachers, schools, educational methods and procedures; and (4) work for educational conditions essential for democracy.

Under the courageous chairmanship of Professor Alonzo Myers, Dean Ernest Melby, Dean Harold Benjamin, and now, President John W. Davis, of West Virginia State College, the Commission has investigated numerous cases, among the best known of which are the ones in Chicago, Illinois; North College Hill, Ohio; and Kelso, Washington. Already in manuscript form are reports of investigations in Pasadena, California; and Oglesby, Illinois. Both reports will interest all concerned with public education.

"Family Physician" Called

The Defense Commission is sometimes called the "trouble shooting"

force of the teaching profession. Actually we like to compare our function to that of the doctors. We have a frequent job of diagnosis—studying the symptoms and complaints and endeavoring to arrive at correct conclusions as to the cause of troubles. We have a prescriptive function; we try to suggest remedial activities to bring about improvement. We occasionally have an autopsy to perform; we study a dead issue to find what killed it and how to save others. But most important to us, and most difficult to us, as the medicine, we have a preventive function—to try to keep healthy educational situations healthy!

Today I have the tough duty of an old friend and family physician who stops you in passing and says, "John, what's the trouble? You don't look well today. Hadn't you better stop by for a check-up?" For I find it my unpleasant duty today to say that we, as educators, do not look very healthy in some respects right now!

What Are Your Symptoms?

Out in Pasadena, the School Development Council says you are using methods that create juvenile delinquency! In New York, the National Council for American Education says

you are trying to make socialists and communists out of all the boys and girls in your classes. In Detroit, one citizen alleged that there is no sociology or political science textbook in the market that does not teach collectivism. In Boston, a prominent churchman says, you are "godless" and leading the children to atheism. In Washington, because you seek aid for those areas with the most children and fewest dollars per capita, you are accused of developing a sinister plot to dictate the welfare and future of our nation. Look about you—are these, your fellow educators, Communists? Fagins? Sinister plotters? I've never seen persons less likely to engage in such activities!

This democratic-republic of ours is the greatest and strongest nation on earth. We all love it and not only owe it—but gladly give it our loyalty and most ardent support. To say that persons in education are subversive, godless, guilty of sinister plots, are calumnies of the lowest order. At first, we in education were so amazed at such extravagant name-calling, we chose to ignore it as childish, ignorant action. But our silence has seemingly made the disparagers bolder, and it is time now to stand our ground, courageously face our attackers, and with truth, intelligence and our best skill, rewin the confidence and respect that now appear to be in jeopardy.

Possible Maladies

Let us look for a moment at some of our detractors.

There are many who are just victims of the fears of the day. They are scared and they want to do something to allay their fears, and they seek a scapegoat—

or maybe several scapegoats. Someone, perhaps Fulton Lewis, Junior, hints that the schools are full of Communists. Here's something close at hand! Clean out the schools! Of course Johnny's teacher, Elsie Green, isn't a "Commie," but that teacher who always heads the salary committee—she might be one! So clean out the whole faculty! Burn the ship to kill the rats.

There always have been and will be folks with a gripe—justified or not—against the schools. They are usually honest and sincere in their efforts and should be respected. Unfortunately, today some of them are proving to be dupes for forces of less acceptable nature.

There are the lurid, sensational writers and speakers who stir up problems to scare people. I think of Hughes, of the *Chicago Tribune*, as apparently such a person. When the Defense Commission recently sent out a questionnaire to school people to find out the extent and over-all nature of the unjustified attacks on the public schools, Mr. Hughes immediately inferred a sinister plot to kill off *all* criticism, true or false.

There are those with an "axe to grind," like the organization, "Friends of the Public Schools," and the quarterly, "Educational Reviewer." The Friends of the Public Schools originated in Chicago as an anti-Catholic force. It still is such; but now sends its publication to legislators, school board members, club leaders, *et al.*, free of charge, protesting against Federal Aid to Education, and insinuating malevolent plots on the part of educational leaders and organizations. The "Educational Reviewer" purports to review text-

books; but, as the Buchanan Committee of the United States Congress pointed out recently, it actually seems to be a censorship force trying to eliminate all concepts from textbooks except its own orthodoxy of economic, political and social ideas.

Some Detractors Apparently Prosper

And then there are those who make money out of people's troubles. Such a person, I am forced to believe, is Allen A. Zoll, executive head of the National Council for American Education. Zoll was formerly head of an organization listed as "subversive" by the Attorney General of the United States. He has been arrested for attempted extortion. He showed strong anti-Semitic attitudes in opposing the appointment of Felix Frankfurter to the Supreme Court of the United States. Apparently Mr. Zoll watches the newspapers for places where there is some school difficulty. He or his henchmen distribute his pamphlets casting suspicion on the schools, and then "the hat is passed" to collect money. There is much to indicate that Mr. Zoll has made a comfortable living by this method of encouraging dissension and preying on fears.

Oh, well, you say—this hasn't happened to my school—to me! Maybe not yet! But it has happened in California, in Colorado, in New Jersey, in Louisiana, in Massachusetts. Mr. Zoll boasts he will carry his campaign into every state—he is trying to raise money to do just that! *And you and your school may be next—particularly if you are in a large school system where new buildings and increased school tax support are needed!*

Here's the Prescription

What are we going to do about this rather shocking situation? I owe you some sort of constructive answer, or I might be accused of having used the fear techniques of those whose methods and/or motives I have decried!

¶ First, we need to be alert and to know who our enemies are! Watch the papers! Attend meetings! And then alert your local, state, and national officers to threats to educators and education, if such threats occur in your region. The "bugs" attacking the schools can cause a lot of discomfort and can even prove dangerous if ignored; but they are not fatal or even sinister when their real nature and motives are recognized and exposed.

¶ Second, we must be judicious! It would be better to overlook some sinister attacks than to do anything that would inhibit honest, constructive criticism. There are a great many people fundamentally friendly to the public schools, who are worried about what seem to be failures in the methods or materials used in teaching spelling, or English, or mathematics, or history, or any of a number of other subjects. There are quite a few who still need to be shown that some subjects are not "fads and frills." The public, and especially parents, have not just a right, but a very real responsibility to try to keep up with what the schools are doing and to make constructive criticisms.

¶ Third, we must do what our great "General Ike" is trying to do for Western Europe—we must put our forces and facilities and ingenuity to effective use. We are on the move here: (a) The ASCD is preparing an important year-

book on the "Forces Affecting Public Education." (b) We are developing our own coalition of forces for cooperative action—we hope soon to have a working agreement among such groups as the ASCD, the School Administrators, the American Library Association, the Textbook Publishers Institute, the NEA Defense Commission, *et al.*, to work on problems of mutual concern; no organization to control, but each to contribute its special talents. (c) We are preparing handbooks, magazine articles and pamphlets to help local school boards, PTA's and teacher groups to prevent or defeat unreasonable attacks. (d) We are trying to become better public relations people! We need to make the public know that we realize the schools are theirs, not just ours! My two boys went to different public schools—in one, parents were treated as nuisances to be tolerated; in the other, we parents were treated as friends with a mutual responsibility for the children. The second school will never have serious trouble as long as it follows that policy,—the other school is always in trouble! Yet the friendly school really spends little more time on its public relations than the other one does. We must try to win and keep the respect and affection of youngsters, parents and patrons of the schools. Our youngsters could be our most effective public relations agents!

¶ Finally, we must work more closely with our friends! We've got some good ones already. Jack Benny gives us a "plug" now and then. The National Advertising Council has said a lot for us! The bookmen and school supply men are often traveling ambassadors of

good will. The National Citizens Council for the Public Schools and the National Congress of Parents and Teachers and the National School Board Association are powerfully effective national agencies. On the state and local levels there are many others, too often ignored except in times of need, but ready and willing to help if we will but hold out our hands as men and women of good will anxious to work with them in meeting our mutual concern for better communities and better schools, and for a better future for our boys and girls!

Prognosis Is Good

Looked at through the wise eyes of old Doc Sawbones—we may not appear so well at first sight. But a bit of chest thumping, a blood test, a peek down the throat, and an X-ray or so, reveal a fairly robust constitution! I believe the patient will survive—and may be healthier than ever if we will but learn a few lessons!

You and I believe that the system of free public schools is the most fundamental, unifying, constructive force in our democracy. So, too, I am convinced do the great rank and file of Americans believe. Our country is facing great crises. Above all else we need loyalty and unity—and our public schools make their greatest contribution in these areas.

With courage, cooperation, good will, honesty, sincerity, and—of course—perspicacity, we school people of America will make a proud contribution to the winning of that finest goal of peace on earth and good will among men!

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