

States gives indication that the patterns which were adequate in the past have, through freezing, become less acceptable in the present than they once were. For example, an organization designed to produce courses of study is not completely adequate for the production of instructional guides. A system of supervision designed to provide inspection is not exactly comparable with a type of in-service education concerned primarily with the purpose of helping teachers. A testing program set up to check certain accomplishments of students against some arbitrary standards is quite different from a program of real evaluation of instructional progress in terms of constantly evolving goals.

Leaders in curriculum improvement need to be aware of the tendency for

organizations to become rigid, of the tendency for methods of procedure to be determined by the organization, not by the needs of the system. Such awareness and a willingness to make needed adjustments as they become apparent will go a long way toward developing the necessary flexibility in the program.

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Improvement to meet changing needs and changing conditions seems to be a matter of desire rather than of organization. While organizations may be made to meet the needs of the people involved it is possible to get substantial improvement under almost any form of organization if the spirit is willing and if the four items listed above have been properly taken into account.

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## *What Does Academic Freedom Mean for Elementary and Secondary Teachers?*

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Academic freedom is not solely a concern of teachers in higher education. It is today an issue which faces every elementary- and secondary-school teacher. Martin Essex is superintendent of schools, Lakewood, Ohio. He is also chairman, N.E.A. Tenure and Academic Freedom Committee.

THE NEW YEAR begins at a time when freedom to learn, to teach and to think is at low tide for our century. Perhaps never before in our history has there been more confusion about what should be taught, how it should be taught, and the purpose of the American public school.

From the vantage point of the N.E.A. Tenure and Academic Freedom

Committee, one is continuously confronted with the magnitude of the varied movements that attempt to limit freedom to learn. A torrent of restrictive forces is pouring at us. "Freedom to teach without fear or favor" is seriously threatened. To deal with this situation we must be aware of the whirlpools in the stream of economic, political and social change.

The teacher and community school are in the middle of this swirling eddy. There is evidence to indicate that teachers, by and large, may be unaware of the actual extent of alarm that surrounds us. Nevertheless, slowly but surely, self-censorship, based on fear, is becoming an accepted pattern of classroom operation, and generally without protest.

Until the post-war period, academic freedom was almost exclusively the concern of teachers in higher education. Elementary and secondary teachers, within the bounds of propriety, generally were subject only to the restrictions established by the majority in the local community. Occasionally such restrictions were hampering. Usually the hobbles were on the personal life of teachers rather than on the content of instruction.

Fundamentally, and perhaps more than any other aspect of American life, our system of education has permitted an honest search for the truth. In contrast with the situation in many other countries, the approximately 95,000 independent school districts in the United States could pursue the truth as they saw it. The countries with management by a single ministry of education could, and frequently did, teach a party line, however false, as a result of national control. If not propagandistic, it generally consisted of stilted, fossilized subject matter. Certainly such schools failed to combine learning with living, or to apply learning to new problems. A people so trained are easy victims of propaganda since they have not experienced an atmosphere in which various points of view have had free play.

### Teachers Must Maintain Their Integrity

Now, much as an athletic team confronted with the big game of the season, American teachers seem tense. Unfortunately, we can lose all by permitting the poolroom quarterbacks to harass us into a state of frenzy. Unlike amateur strategists or kibitzers in other phases of life, these grandstand coaches apparently have the "pros," the teachers, at bay.

At all costs, the intellectual integrity of the elementary and secondary teacher must be preserved, or restored, as the case may be. The young learner will not have faith in the American way unless his teachers are free to maintain their integrity of thought and purpose. Hypocrisy is not the warp or woof of a strong moral fabric. Nor is suppression of inquiry conducive to teacher self-respect. A profession that permits such a policy to become common practice would soon cease to be a profession. It would be more analogous to the position of a semiskilled tradesman who does what he is told in routine fashion, rather than to the creativity of an architect or a doctor.

American schools can be driven back into the four walls of a classroom unless the profession remains vigorously alert. Students in our schools must be introduced to reality if they are to prepare for reality.

In addition, without the safeguards of a reasonable degree of academic freedom, the teacher may live either in jeopardy of job security or in routinized boredom. An awareness of the worthwhileness of one's service is important to mental health. A classroom

in which students may not pursue free inquiry or express sincere opinions becomes a place of milk-toast nutrition or a veritable police state. Without meat in the diet, the school curriculum develops flabby muscles. Pernicious anemia is inevitable. The school is then prevented from serving its function in our republic.

### What Are the Issues?

What are the motivating purposes of the attackers? I believe it fair to observe that most of them are well-meaning but blinded by various kinds of fear. A few are racketeers, who thrive on hate, current social problems or prefabricated "causes." They solicit funds through clever scare letters or the sale of pamphlets. Their disrupting influence and damaging results have been enhanced by at least two factors. One has been a lack of information about them. However, N.E.A. agencies have headed a remarkably effective movement to discover and expose these predatory merchants of hate, and have solicited the aid of other professional societies to tell the general public about them. These racketeers are made effective by "me-tooers" who join movements of alarm. Frequently they are frustrated souls who should be encouraged by alert local leadership to participate in worth-while causes.

The issues vary from a large city newspaper's attacking the use of the United Nations flag, to the factors involved in public housing or universal military training. It seems that almost every group wants to pre-empt the public school to teach its particular objectives. Unfortunately, these purposes frequently are self-seeking or in sup-

port of a vested interest. These problems run the gamut of management and labor; local, state, national and foreign governments; communism, fascism, isolationism, socialism; numerous local issues, such as zoning, traffic control and rent control; ownership of public utilities; so-called progressive versus traditional education; federal aid to education; sex education; consumer education; race and religion. The elementary and secondary teacher is indeed in deep and troubled water.

### A MULTIPLE APPROACH

How can the profession direct well-meaning groups so that fear, bigotry, opportunism and self-interest will not feed further this stream of confusion? Evidently there is no one answer. A multiple approach appears necessary.

First, it seems imperative to continue to recognize that some of the caustic criticism is based on genuine weaknesses in the present program of public education. It is healthy and wise for one to admit his shortcomings before presenting his virtues. There are few perfect institutions, whether they be marriage, church, government, or what have you; our schools are not an exception.

The public has been told, but evidently with insufficient articulateness, about some of the more acute problems. One cardinal responsibility of our profession today is to guard against letting the attackers divert us from the offensive. The needs of schools must be presented with renewed vigor and clarity. For example, the public should know of the lack of properly prepared administrators. Likewise, the public should know of the many thousands of

substandard teachers, and of the little opportunity for choice when employing those who meet the minimum requirements; or of the inadequately financed, under-staffed and ill-housed teachers colleges. Add overcrowded and large classes, an ever-mounting and unprecedented birth total, little helpful or capable supervision in the great mass of schools, inadequate facilities for essential research and special services, teaching-principals with meager clerical help, *et cetera*, and you have a case for John Q. Critic.

But in every instance the profession must offer constructive leadership. For example, one should explain that the Kellogg Program for the in-service education of administrators is under way. Further, the public must be reminded, as Ernest Melby has done recently, that the school is a part of its community, and that it has partners, good or bad.

Despite all this, "our schools have kept us free."<sup>1</sup> They are the marvel of the century—a truly monumental achievement with a host of supporters. But in telling the public about the need, we can't neglect the rear-guard action necessitated by unscrupulous snipers. The profession, with the N.E.A. leading the way, must vigorously ferret out these peddlers of harm. Such is the rightful function of a professional organization.

### Full Discussion Is the American Way

But we must use care to separate dishonest from honest criticism. Full discussion is the American way, and

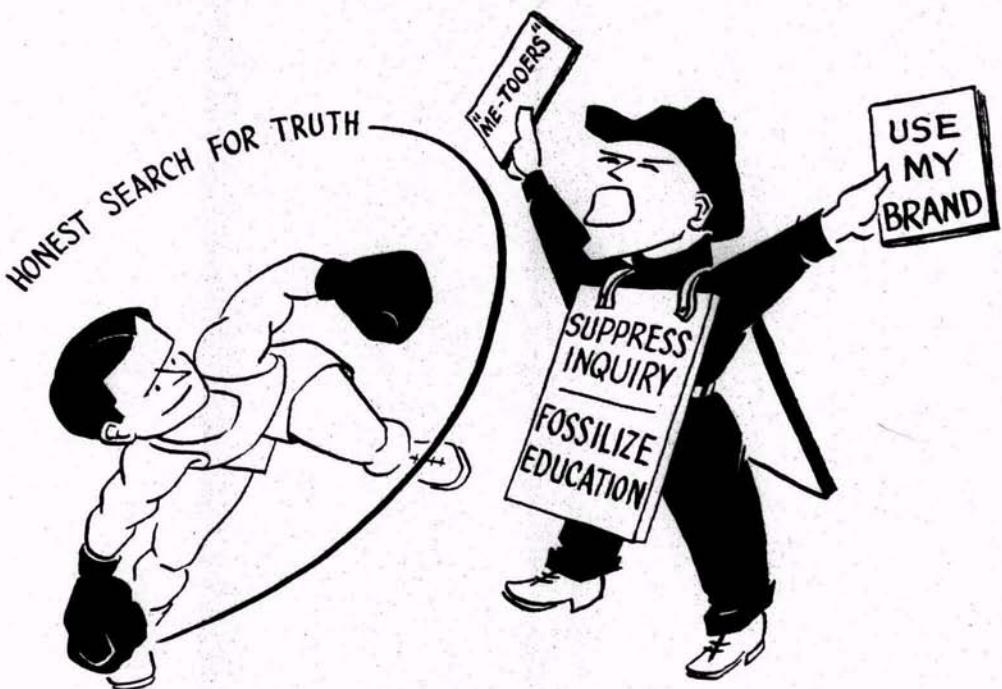
we should be courteous to those who sincerely disagree with us. When criticized, one should carefully evaluate himself. For example, in the current policy of pupil promotion, there may be some merit in more emphasis on individual analysis; maybe some children have been made the subjects of poorly-considered educational experiments; and maybe some school systems have been politically ridden. Let us give hearing to our sincere critics.

• But foremost we must, within the profession and with the general public, attempt to clarify the function of the school in our nation. Constructive, concise and convincing explanations of the modern school must be placed in understandable terms. The profession is becoming alert to this phase of our responsibility. The planning for the 1953 ASCD Yearbook is dedicated to this objective. Likewise, the American Association of School Administrators' 1953 Yearbook will spell out ways to succeed in this critical area.

More members of our profession must direct their talents to this challenging service, as is indicated in Wilbur Yauch's article in *Reader's Digest* for November 1951, entitled, "How Good Are Your Schools?" It is not only a superb summary for lay citizens, but is of equal importance to the organized profession in moving toward greater clarity of objectives.

• Materials must be provided that will help secondary school students learn of the origin and place of the school in this country. Here is an audience that should learn the inspiring story of American education. The State College, Pennsylvania, School Study Council has prepared a good basis of

<sup>1</sup> Commager, Henry Steele. "Our Schools Have Kept Us Free." *Life* 29:46; October 16, 1950.



Courtesy, Joe Wilson, Franklin School, Lakewood, Ohio.

approach in *Learning About Our Schools*. In November, *Scholastic Magazines* presented "Our American Schools," which is helpful.

• Concurrently, we must continue vigorously the development of strong local, state and national professional organizations.

• The professionalization of teaching is an amazing story. Little or no professional training was the common practice before World War I. Now certification is based generally on professional preparation. We should strive for higher standards of preparation.

• Closely allied, and dependent upon strong professional organizations and professionalization, are *good employment practices*. Tenure and continuing contract legislation are now in force in regions that employ approximately 80

percent of the nation's teachers. In a time when academic freedom is in jeopardy, such sound employment practice is more and more to be appreciated.

• Paramount in the exercise of academic freedom is the need for a policy to deal with controversial issues in local school districts. Cincinnati, Ohio and Elizabeth, New Jersey have pioneered in the development of splendid statements. The establishment of definite procedures that will provide for adequate review and consideration, through established channels, of sources of pressure and hysteria appears to be a fundamental step forward. The individual teacher, or superintendent, or the school board member sometimes finds himself in a position in which it is difficult for him to resist encroachment on truth and fact. If the ma-

achinery is established to provide time for the wave of fear to subside or permit an impartial review by respected citizenry, these unreasonable demands may be examined in their true perspective.

• A workshop on controversial issues in San Francisco, at the time of the N.E.A. convention, recommended that the profession gear itself at once to establish the necessary programs for improving teacher know-how in dealing with controversial issues. The Regional Instructional Conference of the N.E.A. at Toledo in April, 1951, gave serious consideration to a similar point of view. The Junior Town Meeting League has prepared two pamphlets which are splendid resources in opening the area of controversial issues to study by teachers. They are, *Teaching Controversial Issues* and *Using Current Materials*. Likewise, the March 1951 issue of *Educational Leadership* is very helpful.

• Sniping at the public schools is such a remunerative journalistic pursuit in the current scene that our profession must direct its energies toward a more effective use of the same medium. Free lance writers are interested in accurate data that will present schools fairly.

• The stage and motion picture screen are exceedingly effective media for presenting dramatically the importance of freedom to think with independence, and without threat. *Goodbye, My Fancy*, both in stage and motion picture form, as produced by Warner Brothers, is a case in point. If this

crucial issue can be communicated to playwrights, their skills will cause lay citizens to think.

• Leaders of institutions and organizations may be induced to develop an orderly policy for considering the grievances which cause them to make the schools a scapegoat for all ills. The American Legion, Department of Michigan, pioneered in this phase of freedom when it adopted a policy on "Evaluation of Instructional Materials."<sup>2</sup>

• The importance of a strong professional organization is quite evident when one reviews the need for adequate research in this area. Reliable data become the basis for action. The N.E.A. Research Division recently completed an important exploratory study for the Tenure and Academic Freedom Committee, entitled, *Freedom of the Public-School Teacher*.

• Basic to freedom of inquiry, and freedom from intimidation, for the elementary and secondary teacher, are *strong school administrators*. Men of training and of courage who withstand the major onslaughts of agitators can be a veritable bulwark in protecting American freedom.

The American people must be made aware that the present swirling currents of fear are of world origin and are a part of social change that is taking place in this post-war period. But with a clear conscience, let's swing from the heels on those who merchandise the current fears and public shortcomings.

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<sup>2</sup> See article by Floyd L. Haight, *Educational Leadership* 8:349-352, March, 1951.

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