

The Listening Post

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Eternal Vigilance

THE OLD EXPRESSION, "busy as a one-armed paperhanger with the itch," could be quite aptly applied to the difficulties that the schools are facing today. Like the paperhanger, they have a major job to accomplish; but one of far greater significance than merely making our environment more delightful, for the education of youth is a task of basic social significance.

Like the paperhanger, the schools are handicapped, for they are beset with rapidly increasing enrolments and a lessening supply of qualified teachers, together with a degree of financial support that has not kept pace with the increased costs of the present era. And again, like the paperhanger, they are beset by a lot of aggravations in terms of unwarranted, untrue and unfair attacks against the schools and their personnel. The "itch" has generally proved to be an uncomfortable irritation, but in several instances it has become serious enough to demand full attention of the schools, the development of special treatment, and sometimes it has resulted in serious additional loss to our American system of education.

Attacks from Several Sources

One of the best examples of this complicated situation for the schools has been the situation existing in Scarsdale, New York, for the past few years. Scarsdale for a long time has had an unusually fine school system of national reputation. Recently a small group of individuals in the community began an

attack on books used in the classes and libraries of the school system. The severity and nature of the attack developed to the point that it affected the morale of the teachers and the efficient operation of the school system. Time and again, however, outstanding citizens of the community, including some of the best known business and professional leaders of the metropolitan New York area, rallied to the support of the schools and the trouble makers were overwhelmingly defeated. The story of the Scarsdale affair is available in reprints of articles, single copies of which will be provided free of charge by the NEA Defense Commission as long as the supply is available.

One of the attacks on the schools in recent weeks was an article which the editor of the *American Legion Magazine* had especially prepared for publication in the June issue. The article follows the same line that the notorious Allen Zoll has used in attempting by extremely minor and non-official items to prove that there is a subversive movement in the public schools. Other magazines have pointed out that the article is distorted, emotional and contradictory to the point that it generally has, with all but the most biased readers, the opposite effect to that which the author apparently intended. For example, in referring to the author of the article, the news-magazine of the Ford Motor Company, *Post 173*, *American Legion* at Dearborn, Michigan, states: "To cite a few of her inconsistencies,

she states that we fail to emphasize the three 'R's,' we use Communist-influenced textbooks by 'subversive' teachers, and that our progressive education is only teaching our students to have no respect for parents or law and order, and that our schools are merely just a mass of confusion. Then in the next breath she states that we are regimenting our children to the pattern of Adolf Hitler's youth movement, to follow one pattern and one system, to cast them into a mold so they won't even be able to think for themselves. In one sentence, we give our children too much freedom with no control, and in the next paragraph we don't give them any freedom! One statement is exactly the opposite of the other. This is typical of the article with its inconsistencies, following one right after the other."

Loyalty Oaths and Investigations

The decision of the United States Supreme Court upholding the legality of the Feinberg law in New York State is likely to bring about a rash of efforts to adopt similar laws in other states. The danger of such laws lies in the fact that they frequently single out teachers for special suspicion and doubtful tests of loyalty. The Feinberg law places the administration of the loyalty program in the hands of the New York State Department of Education and evidence up to date indicates that the law will be fairly enforced. Of particular value is the provision that any individual or organization threatened with damage from the enforcement of the law shall be given opportunity to be heard before final action is taken. Laws pur-

portedly of similar nature proposed in other states have often been poorly drawn and foreboding in their potential effect.

Two committees in Congress will bear watching as to their effects on public education. The Cox committee in the House is aimed primarily at investigation of educational foundations, but its activities may include any type of nonprofit educational organization. Members of this committee have indicated that they will see that their investigations are fair and constructive. Senator McCarran has indicated that his committee will investigate education beginning with the colleges and universities and extending down into the secondary and elementary schools and including a study of textbooks. A statement released to the press, indicates that Senator McCarran has apparently pre-judged the situation and has found education and educators "subversive" before his investigations have officially begun.

The analogy to the paperhanger is not accurate, of course, for teachers have two arms to get the major job accomplished: the right arm of their own direct personal efforts and the left arm of the united efforts of professional organizations. The best "balm" for the "itch" is the use of both "arms" to win the friendship and understanding of the citizens of our communities, state and nation concerning the unique function and contribution of public education to our common welfare.—*Richard Barnes Kennan*, executive secretary, National Commission for the Defense of Democracy through Education, NEA.

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