

Uniting Forces To Improve Education

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Dealing with forces influencing American education today, this column makes its initial appearance in the present issue of Educational Leadership. It is especially appropriate that the first article to appear in this column comes from the pen of William H. Burton, long a courageous defender of academic freedom.

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Remarks Upon Academic Freedom

WE HAVE at Harvard a machine which—speaking loosely—can be said to think. The machine was expensive to build. It has a building all to itself. Give it a problem, turn the switches, throw the levers, and an answer will be forthcoming. We respect and protect the machine that can think.

We have at Harvard also some men who can think. Inside Harvard these men are also respected because the university is somewhat familiar with thinking. Outside Harvard and other colleges and universities, there seems to be considerable fear of men who can think. Thinkers in the arts and sciences, and the academic freedom necessary for continued thinking are thought to be dangerous. The machine is safer.

Attacks upon academic freedom are not new. Every period of social crisis produces criticism of the thinker. Each period in which values and standards change is accompanied by widespread insecurity and fear. The scholar and the liberal churchman, leading the van of honest social analysis, are inevitably attacked. Socrates was charged with undermining the faith in God of Greek youth. The scholar of today, together

with many churchmen, is charged with undermining faith in our form of government, faith in our economic system. Thinkers are charged with supporting academic freedom because it enables them to "teach as they please."

On the contrary, academic freedom is freedom to inquire, to study, to think, to learn, to follow the facts and logic wherever they lead. Academic freedom is less concerned with *making* pronouncements than it is with *discovering* which pronouncement is justified. Academic freedom is *not* and never has been the right to "say or advocate anything one pleases." No scholar ever claimed such right.

Western civilization had its beginnings in, rests upon, and advances through freedom of the mind. Freedom of thought, freedom for the critical inquiring mind, freedom for the creative spirit are basic to progress. Freedom of the mind produced freedom of the press, of religion, and of economic enterprise. The chairman of the board of U. S. Steel, Irving S. Olds, speaking at the 250th anniversary of Yale University said in part that:

"... freedom of education and freedom of enterprise are part and parcel of the same thing—that they are in-

separable—and that neither can survive without the other.

"That is why no true believer in free enterprise will ever let our independent universities die for want of our support; and why no honest devotee of academic freedom will ever seek to destroy our faith in the American system of free enterprise."

The great freedoms of America, of press, of religion, of scholarship, of economic endeavor, are important each in its own right. But let no one be in doubt that the greatest of these is freedom of the mind, freedom for the critical and inquiring mind, for the creative spirit. Let those who would destroy the freedom of the scholar, who would silence the poet, the creative writer, the artist, who would silence all differing opinions—let them remember that all our political, social, and economic freedoms are products of the free mind. Attacking any of our freedoms is to embark on a road with but one destination—the destruction of all freedoms.

Let us heed the words of Arthur Koestler:

"Freedom being a matter of degrees, the great danger for those not immunized by experience is the smoothness of transition to successive degrees of unfreedom. This goes for the whole of our Western civilization. The great catastrophes of history, like the decay of Rome, did not come in one spectacular crash, but by a smooth tobogganing down the slope, which may last for centuries or decades."

Ignorant or careless men in positions of power can destroy the freedoms of any society. Worse, they may be wholly unaware of what they are doing. Freedom of enterprise, freedom of religion, freedom of the press are inextricably bound together.

Safeguard of Democracy

Newspapers which attack academic freedom, whether or not they are also abusing freedom of the press, are inevitably setting the stage for attacks on the free press. An editorial in *Editor & Publisher*, the house organ of the publication world says:

"Censorship is supposed to suppress that which is bad. But it can never be imposed without running the danger of suppressing that which is good. It should never be tolerated in any form in any country in peacetime."

The chief fear of academic freedom stems from the belief that it may be a cloak for subversive teaching, leading to overthrow of our economic system and our government. But the record will not substantiate this position.

The German universities in the nineteenth century enjoyed a great golden age of scholarship and proudly proclaimed their great freedom of learning (*Lernfreiheit*) and freedom of teaching (*Lehrfreiheit*). The twentieth century saw the overthrow of the German government and the nation brought down in crashing ruin. Was the "overthrow" of the government the work of the men of freedom, those who nourished the free, inquiring, critical mind, the creative spirit? Not at all. Overthrow came from those who denied freedom of the mind to anyone, who ruthlessly crushed those who differed. The defenders of freedom were trampled underfoot by the bully boys from the beer halls. The "Bund of the Book Burners" undertook to destroy even the printed records of free ideas.

The Russian universities even under the tyranny of the Czar harbored many renowned scholars, contained several centers of critical inquiry. Was it these men who have fastened on Russia the

most complete blackout of freedom to be found in the historical record? Not at all. Again it was the opponents of free discussion and inquiry. Democratic discussion was done to death. The professors now get their beliefs and directives for teaching, even in the precise sciences, from political commissars. The black shirts who marched on Rome, who assassinated any who disagreed with them, were not free inquiring spirits from the world of academic freedom!

Do those who deny the right of Americans to pursue facts and ideas wish to dictate the beliefs we must teach? While fighting infiltration from the left, let us not be blind to thought control from the right.

Freedom, whether of learning, of the press, of the market place, of political expression, or of religion, can never mean the irresponsible expression of capricious or prejudiced beliefs, the ruthless exploitation of men and resources. No responsible schoolman interprets academic freedom as a license

to "say what he pleases." He will fight, however, to maintain the ancient right to search for facts, to make systematically reasoned interpretations, and to present these without fear or hindrance. The exercise of academic freedom, moreover, inevitably includes respect for the reasoned conclusions of others. *Free interchange of beliefs and open discussion of differences is no mere "right" of the schoolman; it is a cornerstone and safeguard of democracy. Without it cultural decay is as inevitable as the night which it resembles.*

Schoolmen must stand firmly for free learning in a free society. Education is not confined to the simple business of training individuals in the simple skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Education is one of the fundamental institutions by which a society or civilization perpetuates itself, and through which the individual realizes to the fullest his unique capacities. —William H. Burton, director of apprenticeship, Graduate School of Education, Harvard University.

Curriculum Research

Column Editor: J. Bernard Everett

The ASCD Research Program—A Progress Report

IT IS a good thing to stop once in a while to take stock and assess progress. It seems particularly appropriate at this time that we try to assess the progress which has been made in the ASCD Research Program and to suggest what seem to be possible and desirable next steps.

The research coordinator met with a subcommittee of the ASCD Research Board shortly after his appointment to make plans for the year and reach agreements which would guide him in his work with the Association. The

major agreements reached in this meeting are restated since they provide a necessary background for the report which follows.

1. The chief function of the national ASCD should be to assist ASCD state and regional organizations in stimulating and carrying on research activities in their states or regions.

2. All initial contacts should be made through regular organizational channels, that is, the state and regional presidents.

3. The problems studied as well as

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