

Watchman, What of the Night?

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Reporting on the present status of the attacks on public education, the author of this article describes current efforts of many organizations in support of the schools.

ONE of the most frequent questions asked by laymen as well as educators of NEA Defense Commission staff members as they travel about the country is "What is the present status of the attacks on public education?"

Optimistically speaking, there are two old sayings that seem to have application to the present status of the attacks: "When it gets dark enough, the stars come out" and "It is always darkest just before the dawn."

Among the brightest "stars" that have appeared in the gloom are the new and renewed efforts of many organizations in support of the schools.

Probably the most helpful of the new efforts is the National Citizens Commission for the Public Schools and its many hundreds of affiliated local groups. The sincere and constructive studies of school problems initiated through the efforts of the Citizens Commission have brought about broader understanding of the needs of the schools and greater support for programs to strengthen and advance the work of public education.

Certainly the most valuable of the renewed efforts comes through our old and trusted friend, the National Congress of Parents and Teachers, and its state and local units. Any group that is as firmly dedicated to the welfare of America's children as is the PTA is bound to find in each new challenge

renewed strength for greater contributions to the welfare of the schools. The PTA's in general have shown that they recognize that what is best for the welfare of teachers is in the long run important for the welfare of the children in schools.

Other bright stars that have served as beacon lights of encouragement and even as guide lights for the teaching profession have been the encouragement and sometimes the vigorous support of major groups in our national life such as the American Association of University Women, the American Federation of Labor, the American Jewish Committee, the Anti-Defamation League, the Chamber of Commerce, the Congress of Industrial Organizations, the National Association of Manufacturers and the United Church Women, to name but a few. Support from many newspapers and national publications has also been heartening and widespread. Local organizations and publications have been extremely valuable in local situations and, by their proximity, have shown even brighter for local school systems that have been destructively criticized.

A sort of Milky Way of brightness in the sky has come about through the apparent waning of successful efforts on the part of the professional detractors of the schools and of teachers. These people are finding out to their

chagrin that "you can't fool all of the people all of the time."

The potential deepening of the darkness appears to be limited to two areas.

There are recurring reports to the effect that those who do not like public education have made available several public relations experts to work through a group of self-proclaimed patriotic organizations. It is indicated that the schools will not be the only basic American institution to suffer from this source. The use of respectable-sounding, self-proclaimed patriotic agencies as mouthpieces for forces malevolent to American freedom is one of the most dangerous and difficult techniques to oppose.

As indicated above, this activity is so far in the area of substantial, but not substantiated, rumor. It is something to watch for but not to be alarmed about, unless or until it becomes an accomplished procedure.

Legislative Investigations

The other darkest area is in terms of legislative investigations. There have been numerous such investigations by state legislatures and some local groups as well as the Congress of the United States. The results of these investigations up to the present time have varied tremendously. Some of them have been helpful, as in the case of the special committee to investigate textbooks in the 1953 Tennessee legislature.

An "investigation" that is of considerable concern to school people at the present time is that of the Select Committee to Investigate Foundations set up in the closing days of the first session of the 83rd Congress under the chairmanship of Mr. B. Carroll Reece

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of Tennessee. The committee is also authorized to investigate "organizations which have great tax exemptions."

The Chairman, in his opening remarks concerning his concept of the purposes of this committee, has indicated that he personally has already pre-judged some of the institutions he plans to investigate. Mr. Reece listed "a few examples of foundation-financed unscholarly projects which are, in fact, pro-Communist and pro-Socialist propaganda. . . ." ¹ Among these, Mr. Reece includes: "a) the Encyclopedia of Social Sciences is slanted toward the Left"; ² "b) the University of Chicago Round Table is propaganda, not education"; ³ "c) the Citizenship Education Project [of Teachers College, Columbia University] is slanted toward the Left"; ⁴ "d) the Public Affairs Pamphlets edited by a Communist"; ⁵ and "e) the NEA and PEA propagandize for Socialism." ⁶

In his speech, Mr. Reece at one point referred directly to the National Education Association. Mr. Reece stated, "The ideology of the National Education Association was stated in 1934 by Williard E. Givens, who at that time was superintendent of schools at Oakland, California, and subsequently be-

¹ U. S. House of Representatives, 1st Session 83rd Congress. *Congressional Record* 99:140, p. 10191; July 27, 1953.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, p. 10192.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 10193.

⁶ *Ibid.*

came executive secretary of the NEA, a post which he held 18 years. Under the title 'Education for the New America,' in the Proceedings of the 72d Annual Meeting of the NEA, Givens said in 1934. . . ."⁷ He then quotes a portion of three paragraphs of a statement dealing mainly with "a dying *laissez-faire*."⁸

Without our passing judgment on the nature of the statement which Mr. Reece quotes, the fact is evident to anyone who seeks the truth that it in no way can be taken as an indication of "the ideology of the National Education Association." In the first place, the statement was not made at a meeting of the NEA but was made at an entirely separate convocation of the then Department of Superintendence held at a different time in another city. This department was autonomous in nature and even its official actions represented only the policy of an independent agency, a majority of whose members were also members of the NEA but represented only a small fraction of the total NEA membership. However, the report to which Mr. Reece refers was not an official action even of the autonomous group, for it represented only the contemporary thinking of a small discussion group. Dr. Givens' only relationship to this report lay in the fact that he had been responsible for organizing a number of discussion groups for the Department of Superintendence and these groups handed him their reports for presentation to the department assembly. The reports did not become official policy of the department but were simply received and filed. To

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

attempt to use the words of a temporary discussion group of an independent organization of less than ten thousand members as an indication of the official policy of another agency of half a million members is ridiculous. It is in the same class as saying that the Browns must be an immoral family because Dr. Brown's nephew said a naughty word when he was down at the swimming hole with a group of his chums during his early adolescence.

Whether or not the present period is actually that of the deepest darkness just preceding the dawn, and just how bright that dawn will be, depends in large measure on the activities, the unity and the leadership of the teaching profession. In fact, it can well be said that the future will be bright in direct ratio to our response to the challenge of the final paragraph of the ASCD Yearbook for 1953:

"The American people have a right to look to their teachers and educators for leadership. Educational leadership is a tough, rugged business in our country at the present time. The schools are at the center of nearly all of the bitterly contested issues in American culture—race relations, politics, religion, international relations, and others. This nation and its freedoms will stand or fall by what happens to the education of its people. What happens to education will depend on how much of the power of the people is brought to its support. That is the challenge to educational leadership in our times."⁹

⁹ *Forces Affecting American Education, 1953 Yearbook, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, NEA, Washington, D. C.: the Association, a Department of the National Education Association. 1953, p. 174.*

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