

# Uniting Forces to Improve Education

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*Robert A. Skaife, a member of ASCD's Commission on Forces Affecting American Education, is now a field representative for the National Education Association, going to his new work from the staff of the National Commission for the Defense of Democracy through Education. At the request of the editor of this column he here reflects upon his work with the Defense Commission. In submitting his reflections he said that it would be difficult for him "to evaluate adequately the personal benefits received" from his association with the Defense Commission, that the staff members of the Commission give "unselfishly of their time and effort for the cause of public education," and that his present position of field representative for the NEA should enable him to promote further the work of the Defense Commission and, indeed, of other NEA Commissions and Committees. His experience will be an asset to ASCD's Commission without doubt and we are happy to have him give of his time to take a sober look at the years which have just passed.*

—H. GORDON HULLFISH, professor  
of education, The Ohio State  
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## On Having Served the Defense Commission

IT WAS A rewarding experience to be a staff member of the National Commission for the Defense of Democracy through Education. My experience, as it happened, coincided with the period when the schools of this country were on the receiving end of planned campaigns of destructive criticism. During these years (and they are just immediately behind us) the Commission's services in exposing and combating such influences were vital to the interests of the teaching profession. This statement in no way implies that the Commission's work is less important today than previously. Its task is still to combat unjustified attacks on our

schools and, it seems safe to say, there will never be a time when public education will be completely free from pressures exerted by misguided patriotic and taxpayer groups that operate on the principle, "Let's reduce school costs regardless of the damage done to the curriculum and instructional services."

The situation today regarding pressures against the schools is much better, in my opinion, than at any time during the past six years. In 1949 groups like the National Council for American Education (Allen A. Zoll, executive vice-president) were growing in significance as organizations exerting a national influence. The well-known Pasadena af-

fair in 1950 dramatized the dangers of such pressures from a national source. It was to be expected that legislative committees, spurred on by misguided vigilantes so concerned with the nation's security that they minimized the basic securities guaranteed in our Bill of Rights, would probe "subversive influences in the educational process." The late Senator McCarran's sensational charge, "There are hundreds of Reds in the schools," turned out to be an exaggeration. Responsible legislative committees found that only an infinitesimal percentage of teachers could in any general way be regarded as disloyal to the United States. When it became obvious that the legislative investigations were not producing the evidence they needed, the misguided vigilantes shifted gears.

The new emphasis was on "socialism," a term which delighted the extreme critics of the schools because it could be applied in so many ways. It served the purposes of those who opposed public schools in principle, of those who equated communism and socialism, and of those who regarded any increase in governmental expenditures as a promotion of socialism. The height of absurdity was attained in the Reece Committee investigations of tax-exempt foundations and comparable organizations when the term was used in an attempt to discredit many of the major foundation grants.

What is the situation today? The voices of the extremists have died down, mainly because many of the organizations through which they spoke are out of existence or are ineffective. But the clamor already raised has provided opportunities for those critics

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who, for the most part sincere, have disapproved of the aims of modern education and who, in particular, have resented what they regard as an intrusion by educationists into areas which they believe should be controlled by the proponents of the scholarly disciplines. This point of view is perhaps best exemplified in Arthur Bestor's *The Restoration of Learning*. The main threat from this type of criticism is the creation of a lack of faith on the public's part in the competence of educationists, who are portrayed by Bestor as an inferior breed, devoid of scholarly qualities. Such a threat can never become a reality, however, if there is a high degree of mutual interaction between the schools and their communities.

The need for this close relationship has been promoted by the National School Public Relations Association, a department of the National Education Association, as well as by other divisions of NEA. Especially significant was the formation of a joint NEA and Magazine Publishers Association Committee. From this relationship has come a marked increase in articles on education in popular magazines. There

has been a trend away from an undue emphasis on negative types of articles and towards those that take a more moderate point of view. With many different types of articles to read, parents and others interested in schools can do some thinking for themselves, visit schools to find out what is being taught, and come to some conclusions of their own. Educators ask no more than an opportunity to present their side of the story to the general public. The Defense Commission has helped them gain this opportunity.

I would be overlooking one of the major functions of the Defense Commission if I failed to mention the many significant investigations in such places as Pasadena, California; Mars Hill, North Carolina; Miami, Florida; Houston, Texas; and Kansas City, Missouri. These investigations have rendered important services to the communities concerned and to the teaching profession as a whole, and they will continue to do so.

—ROBERT A. SKAIFE, *NEA Field Representative, National Education Association, 1201 16th Street, N.W., Washington 6, D. C.*

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