

Teaching About Communism

... not as a crash program

THE title of this article is being used more to identify it with the current debate on teaching about communism than to indicate the attitude taken here toward that debate. The vigor and the massiveness of the ideological attack upon American free institutions cannot be allowed to place us in the position of defending those institutions unless we accept the dictum that the best defense is a good offense.

Thinking in terms of teaching about communism seems to suggest an emphasis upon a single phase of a much broader field of instruction. Thus the central theme of our teaching effort should be that of our own dynamic democracy and its accompanying system of free enterprise while placing communism in proper perspective in relation to that theme.

The teaching act should concentrate upon the basic elements which constitute these free institutions and which are in need of careful re-analysis and re-interpretation by competent scholarship. There is a renewed need to restate these elements in terms that can be communicated to students with comparative ease. Greater depth of understand-

ing may be sought by drawing upon the very considerable literature on American political and economic thought. The student should also have ample opportunities to become acquainted with the richness of the American heritage through a deeper study of the history of the nation and through more extensive exploration of the historic experience of all mankind.

Communism itself is not central to our theme. To label the forces that threaten our free institutions as communism is to be tempted to divert our attention from the exact center of those forces and, through misunderstanding them, to take a wrong posture which is defensive and a poor strategy which follows the line of indoctrination rather than that of education.

We must do better than be "against"—we must be "for." We have had experience with static defenses like that of the Maginot Line and the defenses of Singapore before the Japanese attack. In a like sense, in the ideological struggle we must face outward from the citadel of freedom secure in the knowledge of that which is our own and with the

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capacity to direct our efforts outward from this secure base in any direction.

Realities of Power

We must retain this fluidity of action because, while we fear communism today, it was only yesterday that we feared fascism and nazism and before that European imperialism. Who knows what future dangers may appear and from what direction they may threaten?

If not exactly communism, what then is the nature of the hostile forces that this nation faces in the world today? It seems that the game of international politics as it is played in our time has changed very little from that of the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. We still are playing the game of balance of power between power systems in which national states pursue their own interests, as they conceive them to be, in the almost total absence of any sense of international morality, either as ethics or law, and in spite of the very considerable efforts made by international bodies like the United Nations to seek an abandonment of this state of international anarchy. These are the realities with which we must deal.

The power system which is in opposition to ours is in the form of a powerful national state well equipped to wage war on the military, diplomatic and propaganda fronts. It has allies and fellow travelers who subscribe, in varying degrees and with some differences of interpretation, to the teachings of Karl Marx as modified and expanded by Nikolai Lenin.

Geographically, the danger stems from the land mass of Europe and Asia which, under the leadership of Russia today (and perhaps someone else tomorrow), seeks to extend its system of production

and markets, its control over resources and trade, its technology and space ambitions in rivalry with our own. We presently are able to deny it control over some of its land projections as in Western Europe and Southeast Asia and we have friendly protective bases nearby in the case of England, Japan, Formosa and the Philippines.

Communism has a very special place in these rivalries and, as such, needs extensive study as an adjunct to the larger issues between the power systems. It provides the opposition with an exportable idea which its adherents hold with a degree of fanatic enthusiasm and which may be used by their power system as a vehicle by means of which to ride to world power and dominion.

The study of communism then should not be undertaken alone and apart from the whole spectrum of economic thought and its associations with political systems. It needs to be studied in context with socialism and capitalism and examined in association with the study of totalitarian systems and their relationships to anarchy and democracy.

Study of Ideologies

Therefore, the responsibility of the educator today is exactly the same as that which has been his almost from the beginnings of the nation. He becomes an instrumentality of the state as the nation seeks to exercise its right to perpetuate its institutions through the training of the nation's youth in its basic concepts which are in process of evolution down the course of the nation's history. That right is no less true of a democracy than of other forms of national states some of which may exercise this right with greater ardor than is our general practice.

Teachers who have been trained in western schools and universities in the "scientific" (historical) method of thought may find themselves torn between their own commitment to free institutions and their desire to reflect their training by an objective approach to the study of ideologies. There is no obligation to be objective. Pure objectivity is a near impossibility and to attempt to maintain such objectivity in the face of the extreme bias of the opposition propaganda attack would only serve the ends of the opposition.

There is an obligation to be intellectually honest in relationships with students. This honesty includes an open acceptance of attachments to home, community, state and nation and a readiness to admire the economic opportunities and social achievements of our mixed society as well as to recognize its faults. Honesty includes providing the student with a good opportunity to seek for the truth and for the more mature student that opportunity should include the right to look anywhere. Not only should the raw material of our own nation's story be open to the student but also the corresponding raw material of the history of any other people.

Experience in Democracy

Democracy has nothing to fear from such a seeking after the truth. If in the search for truth certain weaknesses and inequities in our own society are revealed, they will serve to emphasize the presence of change in our lives and it is that same capacity to change which is one of the most constructive features of the system under which we live. The student needs to face up to the fact of change in human affairs and to be helped to see that the direction that change

needs to take in this country is that which is indicated by our own historic development and within the framework of our own institutions which are designed to preserve and enhance the basic freedoms.

Education in democracy can be introduced at all levels. The primary institution which is the home has many opportunities to practice such training from the home storytelling circle to the practice of democratic procedures in the family conference on matters of family policy and family business decisions, including the preparation and adoption of the family budget.

The school has an obligation to introduce instruction in the more complex philosophical aspects of democracy and to help the student at more mature levels become more articulate about the workings of our free economy. However, each level can share in making its own educational contribution in democratic education.

It is a good thing for students to become articulate about the world of ideas, particularly about those which are related to our own society. Yet the mere pronouncement of approved phrases or scoring well on prepared tests and questionnaires is not enough. Democracy is more than philosophy; it is also a matter of practice. The practice of democratic procedures needs additional encouragement at school as well as in the home. Opportunities can be found in the classroom, homeroom, assemblies, sports activities, through student participation in school management and in other related school activities to give young people practice in basic democratic concepts.

Sometimes an administrator, recognizing the importance of the social studies, seeks ways of expanding the curriculum by the addition of more social studies.

The introduction of a separate course about communism, however, is not a recommended approach to solution of this problem. If the social studies were to offer separate courses in every area that challenges the attention of school people, there would be room for little else than social studies in the instructional program. It seems to be more practical, therefore, to build basic citizenship education around existing courses.

There are excellent opportunities in such courses as world history, modern history, economics, government, and United States history to introduce material of the kind that we have under consideration. Most social studies instruction includes education in current affairs and world issues at some point and offers ideal spots for the inclusion of information about the struggle for freedom against the forces of totalitarianism.

Basic Citizenship

Similar opportunities exist in the elementary schools to include such instruction as is appropriate to each grade level in the programs now in operation.

A school that fails to develop a program of basic citizenship education to meet the challenges of today is inviting intervention on the part of outside forces. It is not in the best interest of freedom to have such education fall under the influence of the less rational forces within the community no matter how well-intentioned these may be. In this direction lies indoctrination rather than education; demagoguery rather than democracy. Instruction needs to remain in the hands of the professionally prepared social studies teacher and under the direction of a school administration able to resist pressures.

A key to the success of a program of enlightened citizenship training lies less in the juggling of titles to courses and the distribution of curriculum guides than in the kind of investment which the community is making in the human resources which are providing leadership for its youth. Suppose we might assume that a community begins by employing adequately trained teachers and by supporting them at a standard of living that enables them to employ fully their talents in the profession for which they are trained; such a state, however, may be highly transitory. The impact of change today is such that one may say that the teacher who has been away from the centers of higher learning for as little as three years is likely to be out of date and if he has been away from school for five years, he may be seriously outdated.

Many existing in-service education programs for teachers have inadequacies. If these programs consist of occasional attendance at workshops or institutes concurrently with the conduct of the teaching program, they may serve to siphon off time, attention and energy from the essential tasks of teaching and administering the school and thus defeat their own purpose. It is unrealistic to expect that a teacher can give effective service in the classroom day after day and spend his evenings taking additional courses in schools. Such an extra effort by a teacher may draw upon those reserves which must be renewed through living something that resembles a normal life in the home and in the community beyond the extended school day.

If we attach to the educative processes in our democracy the importance which the many responsibilities that we assign to it imply that we do, there must come about a recognition of teaching as a full-

time profession with the stature to correspond to the importance of the task which is before it. The image of a short day, an abbreviated week and an extended vacation during the most seasonable part of the year must give way before the impact of the new demands which are being made of education, particularly in the field of social studies.

The obvious time for the reeducation of teachers is during the summer months. This kind of opportunity has existed for many years but more must be made of it than an opportunity. There must be an ability on the part of the professional teacher to take advantage of this opportunity.

Just as a machine cannot retool itself, the teacher can no longer be expected to find within his own resources the means for such reeducation. The teacher's time must be made available through an extended contract of, for example, eleven and one-half months. Means must be found from private and public sources to underwrite the added costs of tuition, transportation and other items.

There is a need for some basic changes in the thinking of teacher education institutions. Teachers who already have advanced degrees and who are of proven scholarship need to have available a retraining program which is not designed for further degrees and additional demands for scholarly attainment. The purpose of such a program should be to inform and to stimulate through contacts with scholars and with other teachers who have the same community of interest; to engage in some adult conversation and do some mature reading.

Under the circumstances, there is no need for such pressure devices as grades and teacher evaluation programs. The summer should be used to renew the teacher's reserve of emotional and ner-

vous energy rather than to further exhaust it through the employment of artificial devices of the sort sometimes used with more immature students.

Thus, we return to the point from which we departed. There is a need for teaching about communism, not as a crash program in answer to the excitement of the current crisis, but as a rational part of a broader approach to citizenship education which emphasizes an understanding of the constructive forces that are at work within our own society against the background of the perspective of history. Such a program should remain under the control of the professional teacher and not be permitted to fall under the influence of some pressure group either from the left or the right. There is a need to renew the teacher's resources from time to time through a program of reeducation conducted during the summertime and financed from resources within the community. In this way, the present generation will have fulfilled its obligation to the next one by giving it an opportunity to steer its own course within the framework of democratic and free enterprise institutions which have been retained and improved because they have been understood as a further adventure in this nation's progress toward the freedom of the human spirit.

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