

MILITANCY AND



IN SEEKING to identify the individuals and groups who comprise the militants in education in the late 1960's, educators will have to restructure their thinking. The term "militancy," until very recently, was used to refer mainly to teachers unions and associations which went on strike or boycotted against local school districts for reasons such as salary, security, or methods of dealing with disruptive pupils. Recent developments have created a new group of militants and thrust together the militant teachers, school administrators, and boards of education.

Who Are the Militants?

The new militant is likely to represent a local community group. Also, he is likely to be black and, more often than not, poor. The new militancy can be recognized today by the cry for decentralization and local control of the schools. This is an integral part of the total "black power" movement.

This new militancy presents a fundamental challenge to professionals in education at all levels, for what it seeks to do is to bring external power to bear on those in the profession. The militancy of teachers, or what might be termed the old militancy, involved the clash between groups which were part of the school bureaucracy. As such, it became a kind of contest for power

and control by one group at the expense of the other. Specifically, teachers sought to obtain more influence and control at the expense of school administrators and the local board of education. The important point is that this struggle took place in such a way that no matter which group emerged victorious, the system or bureaucracy of the school survived.

Decentralization Issue

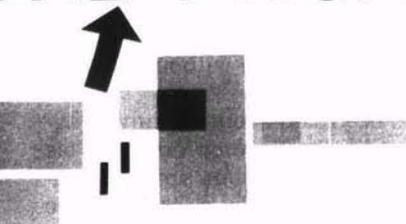
The importance of the new militancy is that it seeks to alter greatly the existing school system. Decentralization of the school system threatens all the groups that exist within the system. Board members, supervisors, principals, and teachers all stand to lose some of their institutional powers and prerogatives if decentralization occurs.

A clear illustration of a situation involving the new militants is provided by the recent clash of the board of an experimental local school in a largely Negro section of New York City with the teachers union, the city school board, and the middle level administrators in the school system. The local board's decision not to rehire 10 teachers threatened the job security provisions that the teachers union had established.

Thus, we have a confrontation between the organized teachers and the local people in the community. This situation in New



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WAYNE J. URBAN *

York City is likely to be the forerunner of similar situations in our other large cities. It is highly unlikely that any group of teachers would willingly acquiesce in threats to their job security. Even if teachers who were so threatened were not unionized, most belong to the local, the state, or the National Education Association; and one of these groups would be expected to defend the profession.

The New York City situation signifies the transfer of the militant label from teachers to local people. The teachers in the New York City dispute were supported by principals and supervisors. The new militancy confronts the entire organized professional education system and it demands significant changes. This is the challenge that decentralization hurls at educators.

The frightening part of the entire situation is the lack of response from educators to the demands of decentralization. The old militants, the teaching organizations, stand arm-in-arm with others defending the status quo.

Consequences to Curriculum

The militants now have been defined briefly and the nature of the opposition has been discussed. What are the implications of the new militancy for those in curriculum and supervision?

Three main points seem to deserve mention. First, in the dispute between teachers and administrators, the curriculum and supervisory people appeared to be in a kind of middle position, not totally committed to either group. This position enabled supervisors and curriculum workers to view the disputes in a more detached manner and thus possibly be in a position to be mediators. In any event, the people in curriculum and supervision did not have to identify with either group. Thus, they usually were able to stay out of the dispute or at least to avoid the total involvement of those who were the adversaries.

In the challenge presented by the new militants, curriculum people are no longer "in between." They are an integral part of the total educational profession that is under attack. In fact, as we shall shortly see, both curriculum and supervision are under direct attack. I do not know whether curriculum people relished or disdained the middle role. The point is, this role is now over.

Second, the new militancy, insofar as it represents a black power point of view, presents a direct challenge to those in the curriculum field through its demand for courses in Negro history and culture. The demand for a Negro history course is being

* Wayne J. Urban, Assistant Professor of Education, University of South Florida, Tampa

voiced in many large school systems in the country. Other courses such as those in literature, music, and art either are or will be under pressure to recognize the contributions of black people.

This direct challenge ought to force persons in the curriculum field to reconsider the rationale that is used for course development and selection in the schools. If curriculum people find reasons to argue with the demands, these reasons should be clearly stated. The challenge itself must be recognized and considered as legitimate and significant.

A third consequence of the new militancy is the possible effect on the positions of persons in supervision. The push for decentralization in the New York City system, as well as in other big city systems, implies a removal or a restructuring of the position of supervisor. If the power of the central office is decentralized and several local offices assume control, a certain number of supervisory positions may likely be eliminated.

Accepting the Challenge

Those positions that are not eliminated probably will be altered greatly. Decentralization, if properly applied, might make the supervisor more of a helpful assistant and resource person to the teacher rather than an arm of the central office. This development is a hopeful sign and, if it occurs, it might bring renewed life to the function of supervision.

What the new militancy means for people in curriculum and supervision is that

they can be less concerned with being in the middle of teacher-administrator conflict and more prepared to think about the total educational picture. The contention of the new militants that decentralization is in order is one that is hard to refute. This is especially true for those who have seen or been involved in the actual operations of a large school system. Rather than fight the move toward decentralization, the job of educators ought to be to try proposing thoughtful plans that accomplish decentralization without emasculating the teacher.

Much has been said about the unwillingness of black militants to compromise. This assertion seems presumptuous since educators have been very slow to respond to the issues that have been raised. Once they respond with concrete proposals, a truer test of the black militant's willingness to engage in dialogue and compromise will result. It is the job of all in education, including those in curriculum and supervision, to think deeply about the challenge of the new militancy and how to meet it.

The specific challenges to supervisory personnel and curriculum people that have been enumerated previously represent situations that should be viewed, not as threats by deep, dark, subversive forces, but rather as opportunities to improve these fields. The new militancy has pointed out conditions that demand reform in the areas of curriculum and supervision. I believe that the militants may turn out to be a positive force if all persons in education make an attempt to respond affirmatively and insightfully to their proposals. □



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