

# A QUESTION

**W**E HAVE heard a great deal in recent years about teacher militancy and student dissent. Scarcely a day goes by without the newspapers reporting an incident of either or both; general magazines and educational journals are replete with articles discussing why militancy exists and what the causes are of student dissent.

Surveys report that more than half the junior and senior high schools in the country have experienced some kind of student protest—usually concerned with school regulations and the curriculum. We are told that teachers are:

... committed to assuming more responsibility for the solution of the problems of society. . . . teachers are very concerned about and desire to be involved in decisions as to how children are to be educated. . . . teachers desire to achieve true professional status. . . .<sup>1</sup>

## From Resentment to Militancy

This is undoubtedly true for the majority of teachers and principals; most of those in education sincerely want to do the best they can to provide a high quality of education for children. Yet teachers and students alike suffer, as do all of us in education, from the shortsighted and even downright stupid ac-

<sup>1</sup> John W. Brubacher. "Why Teacher Militancy?" *Educational Leadership* 27 (1): 30-31; October 1969.

tions, regulations, and behavior of some teachers and administrators. Many of these actions raise real questions regarding professionalism as well as being in seeming opposition to stated concerns for the best education for children. Witness the following incidents, all of which actually occurred in junior and senior high schools within the past four or five years, reported without exaggeration or embellishment, and all taking place in what are considered to be "good" schools:

- A professional man who is moving in mid-January is told that his son, a high school junior and a good student, will have his grades lowered one full step in each subject because he is leaving in January, one week before the end of fall term. The father is told, "Mr. Sylvester, you'll just have to leave one week later."

- A high school athletic coach, who teaches some 10th-grade health classes, regularly sent boys from his health classes across the street to buy cigarettes for him at the corner grocery during class time.

- A ninth-grade health teacher required term papers with topics so difficult and obscure that students were frequently forced to make use of medical books to secure information. After completion of work that would do credit to a first-year medical student, the research papers were never collected and the boys were told that the project was only an exercise.

- A boy who had been an attendance

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problem returned to high school and was sent home by the attendance director before he got to class, because he was wearing sandals. The boy did not return to school.

- A family that had made plans several weeks in advance to attend Hemisfair was told that the daughter must remain in school to take a test in a subject field. Although the test was not a regularly scheduled exercise, the teacher and principal were adamant. The family canceled its plans.

- A family moved to another state eight days before the end of the fall semester. The girl's physical education teacher refused to make out a grade for the sophomore girl when the request came through for a transfer of records, because the girl (in eight days) had missed two full units of physical education.

- An eighth-grade teacher told his cadet teacher at the beginning of the semester, "Don't smile at the class for at least the first six weeks." The student teacher requested a change of assignment.

- The week before Christmas was designated as "Closed Week," that is, there were to be no activities scheduled that might disrupt classes and pre-Christmas tests. On Wednesday a bulletin was sent around which read: "Please excuse the following boys all day Friday to participate in a Christmas Wrestling Tournament."

- A student who was failing the first semester of a foreign language went to the counselor to request a transfer to another sub-

ject. She was told that she could not transfer if she were failing—only if she had a passing grade.

- At the end of fall semester those students who failed the first half of algebra, geometry, or a foreign language were not permitted to transfer to other classes for the second semester. They were compelled to remain in their original classes, doomed to failure of a full year's work in that class. There existed what might charitably be called poor motivation for learning.

- "This is test week and, for this reason, it is Closed. No activities will be scheduled. There will, however, be a pep rally sixth period Tuesday and the cheerleaders are to be excused all day Friday."

- An 11th-grade student in fourth-year French checked out of the school library a French book containing stories in French. According to the date slip this book had not been checked out for over ten years. The student was not permitted to renew the book so he went to the shelf, secured copy number two of the same book, and checked it out for two weeks. The rules had been satisfied.

- A junior high school girl, who had been kept home from school for several days under a doctor's care for treatment of respiratory allergies, returned to school with her medication and a request that she be excused from physical education because it was a cold, windy, dusty

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day. She was not permitted to miss P. E. and, because she was late dressing out, was made to walk around the dusty track for the 45-minute period—with eleven dollars worth of allergy medicine in her purse.

- The school district had changed to computerized data gathering and use. Each high school teacher was asked to mark, with an IBM pencil, a Student Characteristic Card for each of his students—a total of 150-175 students. Each card contained nine categories, each with six possible selections. Allowing two minutes per card for careful and considered judgment, this totals well over five hours of time per teacher. The purpose of the cards was never told to the teachers.

- The school had a balance in its activity fund in excess of \$75,000, yet each organized club or group was expected to finance itself, to buy a page in the school yearbook, to provide totally for or to contribute to a scholarship, and to contribute to the school. To aggravate the situation, the basketball coach visited every club and requested \$25 from each group to finance a luncheon for a number of visiting coaches, and to purchase mementos for the coaches.

- The girls' P. E. teacher announced to her class at the midpoint in the fall semester that their grades were based  $\frac{1}{3}$  on projects,  $\frac{1}{3}$  on written tests, and  $\frac{1}{3}$  on "dressing out." Nothing was mentioned relative to a grade for physical education.

- This notice came blaring over a high school intercom without warning: "The following teachers made mistakes in their grades again. . . ."

- The basketball team is excused from school  $\frac{1}{2}$  day before a game "to rest." This same privilege is seldom extended to the chess team, the debate team, or even to the school orchestra.

- "Teachers: Our wrestling team has a

match Friday at 2:00 in our gym. In order to generate more interest in our wrestling program and to aid the wrestling program financially, students will be permitted to buy tickets Friday, thus being dismissed at 2:00 p.m. So that no student will miss a class period, we will be on B schedule Friday. At the end of the 6th period those students who have purchased tickets will be excused and all other students will remain with their 6th period teachers until regular dismissal time 45 minutes later." (P.S. "The wrestling match is at 2:00 in order not to conflict with the sophomore basketball game which begins at 4:00 p.m.")

- A girl, a junior in a 2,500-student high school, in their college-type registration at the beginning of fall semester, was unable to enroll in *any* fifth-period class. There was nothing available. It was estimated that over 100 students faced the same problem. The school had no study halls, no resource centers, a closed campus, and limited library facilities. Students who were unable to gain admittance to a class were told that they were to find someone to work for during their "open" period, for example, library, office, guidance office, attendance office, since they could not leave the building while school was in session, neither could they roam the halls.

Many other incidents could be cited but the point has probably been made. Too many teachers and too many administrators give lip service to the goal of providing the best possible education for children while their actions tell another story.

As has been said before, "Too many schools are run for the convenience of administrators and teachers," and, with the current temper of the times, muttered resentment and dissatisfaction are being replaced by open dissent and militancy. □

### Have You a Manuscript?

Much of the content of this journal consists of unsolicited materials. If you have a manuscript which you think is suitable for publication in *Educational Leadership*, why not mail it to us for consideration and possible use? Usually we can make a decision fairly promptly as to whether or not such materials can be included in the journal.

"Letters to the Editor" are also welcomed and will be used if possible. Materials suitable for use in the Features sections "Viewpoint" and "Innovations in Education" will also be welcomed for possible use. Contributors are asked to supply photographs or other illustrative materials with their manuscripts.

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