

To Serve the Interests of the Masses

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for the Radical Caucus

IN this first article in the new Caucus Comments feature we of the Radical Caucus want to explain who we are and where we are heading.

The caucus first came together as a distinct group at the 1970 ASCD conference in San Francisco. Our main common basis was the belief that educators, along with other professional and intellectual groups, should take a clear and unequivocal stand against the U.S. involvement in Vietnam, and that this stand should be reflected in our professional work. In the five years since then, people in the caucus have struggled with what it means to be a "radical" educator, what a "radical" analysis of U.S. education entails, and what action is called for by such an analysis, both inside and outside a professional context. The development of the caucus since then has been toward greater group solidarity and more disciplined study

Editor's note: Inaugurated here is a new and potentially significant feature of the journal, "Caucus Comments." This paper, prepared by the Radical Caucus, will be followed by position statements by other progressive caucuses aligned with ASCD.

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of revolutionary ideology. The process has been time-consuming, but also clarifying.

Since our beginning in San Francisco, people with widely diverse political views have worked in the caucus, and the tensions among these views have pushed us steadily to clarify the ideological basis for a given course of action. Initially, the basic line of conflict was between a humanist and a Marxist outlook: the humanists sought to address the problems of U.S. education by acting to make the schools "more humane," and the Marxists sought to base both analysis of education and the practice of educators upon recognition of the class structure of U.S. society.

The Revolutionary Analysis Has Matured

The humanist outlook holds that oppressive school practices, denial of opportunity because of race, sex, or class, can best be

combated by struggling to change specific policies and practices in schools. These policies and practices are generally assumed, from the humanist viewpoint, to be the result of "mindlessness"; and it follows that the problems can be solved by making people more "aware" of them.

A revolutionary ideology, on the other hand, asserts that the major aspects of our school system, including what the humanists call the "problems" of school, are functions of the class nature of U.S. society and can only be solved through the class struggle. The revolutionary sees the school's oppressive characteristics as resulting from its function in maintaining the rule of the owning classes.

This difference in outlook has not prevented the caucus members from working well together on specific educational problems. For example, on the matter of "student rights," some members of the caucus support the constitutional rights of students in schools because they believe such rights (a) belong to students and (b) will make schools more humane. Other members support the constitutional rights of students in schools because the demands are just, because the struggle for democratic rights for students will illuminate the relation between ruling class interests and school policy, and because in the struggle alliances can be built among students, teachers, and other progressive forces.

During the time when student rights was the main focus of the caucus, we functioned as a loose coalition of progressive-minded educators. "Membership" in the caucus was very fluid, depending on the issues at hand and on the location of various activities. We have always welcomed any and all ASCD members to participate in our meetings, support our activities, and share criticism and comments with us. In the past, anyone who wished to be considered a member of the caucus was a member.

With this openness there came not only cooperation between the different tendencies, but also struggle. As a result of the struggle within the caucus and the changing political situation outside of the caucus, the humanist analysis has been largely left behind and our

revolutionary analysis has matured and become the focal point for continued struggle and learning. While struggling over questions like the adequacy of Marxist class analysis as a method for approaching the problems educators face, we have become less a loose coalition and more a united collective operating on certain clear principles: That the U.S. is organized on a class basis; that its institutions are generally run by and in the interest of a small minority of people who either own or manage most of the productive capacity and wealth of the country; that schools play a critical role in teaching the ideologies and behaviors that maintain the class system itself.

We believe that the activities of the caucus must be based on the proposition that we live in a society where a small ruling class makes decisions in its own interest and for its own profit at the expense of the majority. Unity on these very simple and basic propositions has given us a basis for further

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development of our theory and practice, and thus has enabled us to state our position on a number of issues with greater clarity and identify the projects to which we will be devoting our energies in the near future.

Issues

1. Will the Radical Caucus continue to ally itself with struggles to make schools more humane? Yes, we will. However, the major determinant of our involvement in such struggles will be the extent to which they are useful in exposing ruling class interest in educational practices. This means, for

example, that we are willing to support efforts aimed at allowing students to work outside the school for the purpose of critically analyzing the communities in which they live, while we are not willing to spend energy working toward "more effective team-teaching techniques."

2. Will the Radical Caucus continue to speak and work against educational developments which simultaneously mask and strengthen control of the schools by the ruling class? Yes, we will, and we regard this as one of the more important issues before us. We have already spoken out against the regressive slogans of Individualized Instruction and Career Education, and we intend to develop further our critique of contemporary slogans and programs. For example, the doctrine of "genetic determinism," wrapped in the mystifying garb of "science," will be exposed by the caucus as fascist trash that has emerged in other historical periods that had certain similarities to the present.

3. What is the position of the Radical Caucus with respect to the other progressive caucuses of ASCD? We intend to ally ourselves with the struggles of the other progressive caucuses whenever such alliance is welcome by them and consistent with our ideology.

4. Will the Radical Caucus continue to be open to anyone who wishes to join with us? Yes, the caucus will remain open to those who want to ally themselves with us only on a given issue or who want to join with us in a more systematic way over a period of time. However, we don't want to have more members for the sake of quantity, nor do we want to debate any longer whether class analysis should be the starting point for our work.

5. What is the relationship between the Radical Caucus and ASCD? Many people in the Radical Caucus are also members of ASCD, and all are educators. As a large organization of educators ASCD is a useful forum for expressing our position on the issues before the membership and the profession.

6. What is the main task of the Radical Caucus? To unite the most progressive members of the education profession; to expose and isolate the reactionary trends in education; to align ourselves actively with the democratic struggles of the working class, the oppressed national minorities, women, and youth.

Projects

In relation to ASCD the Radical Caucus now has three major commitments:

1. During next year's (1975) Annual Conference in New Orleans, we will present a program on "Education and Class Analysis." In this program we will set forth in some detail the ideological position of the caucus. In addition to sessions on ideology, we will apply class analysis to topics such as the following: (a) Historic Critique of Schooling, (b) Current Curriculum Practices, (c) Science for the People, (d) The Myth of the Biological Origin of Race, Sex, and Class Roles, (e) Career Education, and (f) People's History.

2. As we did last March in Anaheim, we will again publish a Newspaper for distribution at the next Annual Conference.

3. We will be regular contributors to the Caucus Comments feature.

Class analysis informs us that in a class society institutions like the schools teach the ideology of the ruling class and thus help maintain its power. Educators are faced with a choice: either serve the ruling class or actively struggle against it. The Radical Caucus exists to unite all those who can be united in the struggle to make the schools democratic—to make the schools serve the interests of the masses of oppressed and exploited people rather than the narrow interests of the owners and profiteers.

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