

# Be Prepared: A Response to Charles Park

RICHARD H. STEWART

The issues are different and yet the same: secular humanism, sex education, evolution and scientific creationism, "obscene" books. The *real* issue is control: Who will control what is taught? Educators need to be acutely aware of the difference between *local control* and *vocal control*. To confuse the two is to lose the battle before it begins. You can't let a vocal minority—no matter how loud—dictate what comes off the shelves in your libraries or what is taught in your classrooms.

You never know what issue will trigger a full scale protest. Our school system had been using a social studies textbook called *Greek and Roman Civilization* for many years without complaint. Then the mother of a seventh grade student called, insisting that the book had a picture of Jesus "depicted as a monkey in a green jump suit and handing a banana to one of his disciples." She was referring to a picture of a stained glass window illustrating the Last Supper. She reported this to her minister and he brought busloads of church members to a school board meeting.

The school board refused to remove the book after study by its textbook selection committee, but the incident sparked formation of an organized group called "Decency in Education" that began to protest books such as *Soul on Ice*, *Catch 22*, and *Catcher in the Rye*. After receiving counsel and encouragement from Norma and Mel Gabler, Educational Research Analysts, they formed a political action committee and sponsored candidates for the school board—so far, unsuccessfully.

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Telling lies to the young is wrong.  
Proving to them that lies are true is wrong.  
Telling them that God's in his heaven  
and all's well with the world is wrong.  
The young know what you mean. The young are people.  
Tell them the difficulties can't be counted, and let them see not only  
what will be but see with clarity these present times.  
Say obstacles exist they must encounter sorrow happens,  
hardship happens.  
The hell with it. Who never knew the price of happiness  
will not be happy.  
Forgive no error you recognize, it will repeat itself, increase, and  
afterwards our pupils will not forgive in us what we forgave.

—from Yevtushenko  
Selected Poems\*

Our school board was also one of the first to receive the brunt of the scientific creationism movement. By relying heavily on our legal counsel and the involvement of community leaders and clergy, we've been able to keep our science curriculum intact.

If you don't have a policy for dealing with these kinds of demands, you'd better get one fast. The policy should provide for community involvement, a constructive exchange of views, and an appeal process. School board members should know the procedures, and legal counsel should be sought before complaints come to the board. A board member who knows where he or she stands is much more likely to resist the pressures of organized groups. Districts should also develop a written rationale for each part of the curriculum and for the texts and materials used in the instructional process.

Park has sounded the alarm and educators should take heed. If we allow the brokers of fear to control our schools through their censorship, our children will realize the words of Yevtushenko's poem, "Lies":

It will repeat itself, increase  
and afterwards our pupils will not  
forgive in us what we forgave

Don't think "It can't happen here"; it not only can, it probably will. Like the approaching hurricane, it may turn the other way—it may hit the other city or hamlet—but if the hurricane of controversy keeps blowing anywhere, *you'd better be prepared.* ■

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