

## SHALL TEACHERS THINK?

Since public school teachers are servants of the public, it is well for us to give some attention occasionally to expressions concerning us in the current literature written for the general public and read by the public. It is encouraging and exhilarating to read articles that are commendatory of the schools and of our work; but it may be more helpful and stimulating to read some of the criticisms. So I am choosing a few critical expressions from current literature that may serve as a goad to our professional thinking.

On pages 31 and 34 of *Education, the Machine and the Worker*, a book by H. M. Kallen, published this year by the New Republic, New York, we find the following:

"The bulk of the teachers are quite content professionally to take the easiest way. Standardization relieves them of the responsibility for initiative and the burden of thinking; if they can get by the requirements of the administrative bureaucracy, it is enough. In fact, they show no spontaneous professional interests and no sense of professional integrity. And there is nothing in the system to produce either . . . . ."

"Free public education and private instruction purchasable at a price are both but the community's device to meet the present needs by transmitting the past unchanged. They provide a grammar of assent, not a logic of inquiry. The mental posture they habituate the young in is *not* the posture of reflection. The mental posture they habituate the young in *is* the posture of conformity. They require belief, not investigation. They impose reverence for the past and idealization of the present. They envisage the future as a perpetuation of the past, not as a new creation out of it."

On pages 21 and 22 of *The Nation* of July 1, 1925, Mr. H. L. Mencken has this to say:

"When a pedagogue takes his oath of office, he renounces his right of free speech quite as certainly as a bishop does, or a colonel in the army, or an editorial writer on a newspaper. He becomes a paid propagandist of certain definite doctrines and attitudes, mainly determined specifically in advance, and every time he departs from them deliberately he deliberately swindles his employers."

"A pedagogue, properly so called—and a high school teacher in a country town is properly so called—is surely not a searcher for knowledge. His job in the world is simply to pass on what has been chosen and approved by his superiors. In the whole history of the world no such pedagogue has ever actually increased the sum of

human knowledge. His training unfits him for it; moreover, he would not be a pedagogue if he had either the taste or the capacity for it. He is a workingman, not a thinker. When he speaks, his employers speak. What he says has behind it all the authority of the community. If he would be true to his oath he must be very careful to say nothing that is in violation of the communal mores, the communal magic, the communal notion of the good, the beautiful, and the true . . . . . Liberty of teachers begins where pedagogy ends."

Mr. Mencken does not confine his caustic remarks to elementary and high school pedagogues. He seems to have even less respect for the pedagogues in the colleges and universities. He contributes an article each week for the *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, and in a recent one of these, he said:

"One of the cheerful signs of the times is the spread of revolt in the American universities—not against the Ten Commandments, the Supreme Court of the United States, or the Coolidge idealism, but against the imbecility of pedagogues. The rebels do not whoop for the bolsheviks or birth control or pacifism; they simply protest against being caught by jackasses. Nor is the movement sectional; for two of the principal storm centers are at the University of Indiana, in the heart of the G. A. R. belt, and at the University of Georgia, where the woodbine twineth."

Now, it is not sufficient answer to such criticisms merely to ask sneeringly: "Who in the world is Mencken?" For Mencken is a sort of meteor blazing across the literary firmament just now. He may be a barbarian, but he is the editor of a magazine of his own and a contributor to numerous others. His tirades may be harsh, but they appear in newspapers of wide circulation among all classes of people—his weekly articles in the *Chicago Tribune*, for instance—and his rough-and-ready style and the very fierceness of his attacks attract attention, win applause, and produce effects in this age of the apotheosis of the fighter. Rather than ignore his criticisms entirely, we ought to ask ourselves what basis there is for them. If we find there is reason for such criticism, what shall we do about it? Surely we dare to think whether or not we do think!

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*Journal of Education.* In a recent number of that journal he published an editorial in which he said:

"The college has not stated its objectives clearly in terms of a modern democratic society. It is still a subject-centered institution; it places but little emphasis upon good teaching and requires no professional preparation. That the schools of education in most universities have made and are making important contributions that could easily be learned by some of the professors in the liberal arts colleges is apparently still unknown to the scholastic gentlemen who continue to laugh at 'pedagogy' and to repeat 'if you know your subject, you can teach it.'

"The college still uses the lecture method—if it is worthy of being called a method—it prefers mass instruction, the pouring-in process that Page ridiculed almost a century ago. Poor freshmen, herded into a great classroom, are arranged alphabetically and sit in 'stolid and magnificent inattention' while a bored and indifferent professor delivers himself of a fifty-minute discourse, usually scrappy, ingenuous, unorganized, uninteresting, and unheeded. An instructor checks attendance, gives tests, and marks papers. There is a stone wall of indifference between professor and students. The wonder is that half of the freshmen adjust themselves to the new situation."

Now, in order to learn what happens when pedagogues do think clearly and express themselves with spirit and emphasis, let us go about as far from home as possible and consider an example in California.

Early last spring a change was to be made in the presidency of San Jose State Teachers College of that state. State Superintendent of Schools, Will C. Wood, in accordance with his legal powers and duties, nominated for the position William John Cooper, superintendent of schools at Fresno. The appointment could not become effective until such nomination was ratified by the State Board of Education. But four members of the board were appointees of the Governor, and Mr. Cooper had dared criticize the attitude of the Governor toward educational finance. For instance, at a meeting of the California Association of City and County Superintendents, Mr. Cooper had spoken in criticism of the Governor's budget and had supported a resolution that was unanimously adopted and was as follows:

"We affirm that 1923 will stand conspicuous in the annals of California for an unwarranted as-

sault made upon the educational and humanitarian functions of the state by the reactionary forces of society, and for the single purpose of enabling favored classes of property to evade just and equitable taxation for the support of these functions of the state."

It happens that two of the Governor's appointees on the State Board of Education are editors, and both of them admitted in the columns of their newspapers that their refusal to ratify Mr. Cooper's appointment was based upon his "participation in the resolutions that were passed by that remarkable body of men," as one of them said. The other editor said: "It is true that the state board did take this disgusting political performance of the superintendents into consideration in withholding approval of Cooper."

The *Sierra Educational News*, the official organ of the California State Teachers' Association, in commenting on the editorials from which the above brief quotations are made, said:

"Extended comment on these editorials is unnecessary. It may be remarked in passing, however, that by carrying this reason to its logical conclusion no school man or woman or other citizen, however interested in the welfare of the children in the schools, should presume to raise voice or pen against any executive edict.

"All professionally-minded men and women feel intense humiliation in the attitude shown by the four members of the State Board of Education. When we consider the ability and equipment of Mr. Cooper, and his manifest temperamental adaptability for the position in question, the action of the four gubernatorial members in obstinately and politically refusing to ratify his appointment, stands as a vote of approval and compliment to Mr. Cooper, rather than as cause for adverse criticism of him. It is a strange situation indeed when, with undoubted character, training, and experience, an outstanding school man is refused ratification on political grounds only."

Some of you may say: "But that was a case in which a teacher dared to criticize 'the reactionary forces of society' and thereby imply criticism of the Governor and the legislature." Some of you will answer by saying that one necessary feature of all progress is opposition to reaction and that this teacher, as a leader of teachers who are to teach good citizenship and as an intelligent citizen himself, should not have been



punished for frankly avowing his civic principles. Isn't it probable that he would make a better president of a teachers' college than some subservient tool of reactionary forces and a political ring? The question seems to be: How far shall a teacher go in expressing his civic ideals? Shall he express his ideals of human progress and welfare, or shall he be a mere machine to teach such non-controversial things as the multiplication table and Euclidean geometry?

Let us answer these questions also in the words of current literature written by a man in high standing in our profession. Dr. Henry W. Holmes, of the Graduate School of Education, Harvard University, gave an address at Washington, D. C., on December 31, 1924, as the retiring Vice-President of Section Q of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. This address was entitled, "The New Social Order as Seen from the Standpoint of Education," and was published in *School and Society* March 28, 1925. We shall not give here his ideals of "the new social order," but shall quote only those paragraphs in which he answers the questions asked above. He says:

"Is education to be 'residual' in the sense that educators shall not have their own ideal of what society is to become because of their effort? Are they to take on the left-over jobs, without asking why and to what end such jobs should be done at all? If industry has its social ideal and calls on education to help attain it by doing a specific task, ought we not to say, 'Show us first the ideal we are thereby to serve?' Education has its own angle of vision if it cares to use it.

"Can education, however, reach out toward a new social order? Has it any commission to do that? Is it not the business of education to 'hand on inheritances' and to fit the on-coming generation to the life it must live in the social order that now is? No doubt this is a part, perhaps the larger part, of the business of education; but surely it is not the whole of it. We have in education a great social force which has already worked many changes in our life. It is actually disruptive of old conditions. It does not leave labor as once it was, nor the family, nor government; and as it becomes more powerful—as we actually succeed in making 'universal education not only universal but also educational'—it will become more disruptive. Therefore, we who are supposed to be guiding education ought to ask ourselves what we expect education to accomplish.

What is this force we are letting loose in the world going to do? If it breaks up the old order, what kind of an order do we hope it will help establish in its place?

"The state looks toward a well-governed society: what does that mean? The church looks toward a religious world: what does that mean? We look toward an educated world: what does that mean? What kind of a world do we want when we set to work to get an educated world? . . . . . What conclusions can we draw concerning the social ideal which we as educators ought to espouse? The time has come for us to formulate this ideal constructively and let it take its chances in the world. Education does not exist merely to fit individuals into the social order as it now stands. It does not exist to do what other institutions leave undone. It need not accept as its own the ideals of any other institution or the unconscious trend of its own activities. It need not be blind or complacent as to the direction of its own activities. It is our duty to think out the main outlines of a new social order toward which we shall consciously work. Our hats ought to be in the ring."

And now, my fellow members of the Illinois State Teachers' Association, *we are here to think*. The executive committee of this Eastern Division has prepared a program that will arouse thought, possibly about a new social order and surely about our civic and professional duties. If we are to hurl back the stinging criticisms of Kallen and Mencken and Doudna, it behooves us to give our most earnest attention to the speakers, to gather information, absorb inspiration and formulate ideals, and then to go forth to our daily work with a new vision and the courage, energy, and ability to make it a concrete reality in the lives of our pupils and in the future social order.

HAROLD BRIGHT

It cannot be too often repeated that the educational process is an unending one. While it is based on infancy and its prolongation in man, it reaches out to include the whole of human life, with its constantly new adjustments between man and his environment. The right balance between work and leisure, the development of those wants which increase the value of work and of those tastes which increase the value of leisure, are at the bottom of the problem of human education—PRESIDENT N. M. BUTLER