



DANGER from the Far Right

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THE Far Right, the Radical Right, remains a clear, present, and persistent danger to schools and democracy.

I wish I could report it was becoming less dangerous and damaging. But unfortunately I cannot. With insidious and subtle tactics it continues to infiltrate democratic organizations and seeks to capture strategic positions from which it can dominate and control our schools. In California its efforts last year to replace moderate school boards with "Birch boards" were noted by the president of the State Board of Education. He also reported that Rightists had gained sufficient strength—I quote—"to disrupt the school program" in at least ten school districts.

Constructive Action Incorporated, an aggressive right-wing front, under the guise of an essay contest last year, managed to put 450,000 copies of *None Dare Call It Treason* into the hands of high school and college students.

As Senator Gale W. McGee of Wyoming has said, "It is obvious why the schools have always been a primary target of extremists, both right and left. If

From an address given at the 1966 annual convention of the National Education Association.

you can shape minds when they are young, you will have receptive minds for your plans later on." Senator McGee also noted the John Birch Society's announcement of its intention to establish "cells" in 325 Congressional districts and to spend twelve million dollars to promote its aims this year.

IN A full-page advertisement in the *Chicago Tribune* of December 14, 1965, and various other metropolitan dailies throughout the country, the Birch Society reports it has "a nationwide educational army," "a fully paid field staff," turns out "books and pamphlets with a retail value of about four million dollars a year," and has "350 reading rooms that sell books scattered across the country." For further facts, read *Report on the John Birch Society 1966*, a paperback book by the authors of *Danger on the Right*, Benjamin R. Epstein and Arnold Forster.

Last year Group Research Incorporated, a research organization in Washington, reported that a seven-year trend in increased financial support of right-wing groups continued. There is no ground but wishful thinking to expect a reversal.

The Far Right is a well-heeled, well-oiled, if unwelcome, movement. We can anticipate a proliferation of its activities.

THE Radical Right continues to infiltrate the PTA. It continues to frighten parents with scary tales of a takeover of schools by the federal government and a sellout to UNESCO, which it paints as Communist-dominated. It continues to alarm parents with nightmares about the schools' use of pornographic literature and subversive social studies.

In the Far Right's coloring book, the instructions are to color the schools and the PTA red.

Extremists of the Right continue to endanger and damage American education and democracy. They seek to create distrust and suspicion of schools, churches, courts, civil rights groups, the

national government, and individuals—including the man who has done more for education than any President in history, President Lyndon B. Johnson.

They seek to silence opposition to *their* views by calling disagreement disloyalty and treason. They label those who disagree with their doctrine subversive, traitorous, and Communist.

Their hate propaganda and their tactics of fostering fear and planting suspicion have succeeded in some communities in creating a climate of fear and distrust.

In some instances they have forced school boards, school administrators, PTA's, and other organizations to divert their energies from their own constructive work into combating the lies and distortions they spread.

They have put undemocratic pressures on school boards, library boards, and democratic organizations in order to be able to brainwash young Americans into their point of view by controlling what children and youth are free to learn and free to read.

They try to subvert our democratic tradition of free discussion, group decision, and majority rule.

Defectors to the Far Right are those who try futilely to march backwards into the nineteenth century and drag our schools with them. They block adequate financing of public education. They oppose expansion of educational opportunity. They put obstacles in the way of needed innovation and experimentation in education. They resist efforts to adapt schools to the needs of a changing society and to our nation's social revolution.

ALTHOUGH the PTA's loss of members and local units through the machinations of the Radical Right is probably an organizational gain, the loss of a single PTA member or a single parent-teacher association to the extremists is nevertheless a disaster.

It is a disaster for children. The child whose parents are not PTA members is a disadvantaged child. For PTA membership fosters home-school and parent-teacher cooperation.

It is a disaster for schools. The school whose PTA defects to the extremists is severely disadvantaged. Its teachers' freedom to teach and its students' freedom to learn are endangered. Its administration is threatened and harassed.

Every gain for the Extreme Right imperils our democracy, for extremists would suffocate discussion and choke off dissent, the oxygen by which democracy lives.

So the PTA will continue to exert every effort to win back defecting members and local units. For children, for schools, and for democracy, we can do no less.

Let me add that the PTA is learning to work under stress and to cope with the subversive tactics of the Far Right. We have the very effective, widely acclaimed leaflet, *Extremist Groups—A Clear and Present Danger to Freedom and Democracy*, to help us. To fight untruth, half-truths, and distortions, we have a new pamphlet—*The Truth About the PTA*.

REPULSIVE as extremism, either of the left or right, is to most Americans, it has caused reactions that are positive and constructive. In short, good has come out of evil. And the good that has come out of extremism can be summed up as follows:

IT HAS focused national attention on the importance of democratic procedures.

IT HAS stimulated organizations to scrutinize their activities for lapses from democratic practice. It has alerted them to watch out for infiltration and takeover by totalitarian groups.

IT HAS reawakened and renewed our appreciation of our heritage of freedom—freedom of opinion, speech, and dissent, freedom to teach and to learn, freedom to read.

IT HAS sent adult citizens back to restudy the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, to increase our understanding of citizens' rights, liberties, and responsibilities.

IT HAS led to a recognition of the need to give American youth increased understanding of the Bill of Rights and a firm, educational foundation for the exercise of the rights and responsibilities of citizens in a democracy.

IT HAS made school boards and library boards aware of the wisdom of having written policies on selecting books and determining curriculum in order to withstand the assaults of Rightists on freedom to read, to teach, and to learn.

IT HAS caused citizens to scrutinize more closely the qualifications of candidates for school boards to see whether or not they have ulterior motives for seeking board membership.

IT HAS aroused Americans' sense of fair play and their righteous indignation against such reprehensible Rightist tactics as slander, innuendo, character assassination, threats, intimidation, and coercion.

IT HAS led more and more citizens to demand sources and facts and documentation of charges and accusations made against individuals, schools, and organizations.

IN SHORT, Far Right tactics have served to strengthen the resolution and ability of PTA's and other democratic organizations to defend freedom and democracy and prevent a takeover of education by those who would use our schools not to *educate* but to *indoctrinate* in their own political, economic, and social dogmas.

These benefits, however, have not been conferred willingly or wittingly by the Far Right. The damage they have done or sought to do, on the other hand, has been undertaken willfully and wittingly.

President Johnson has said: "One man alone with his conscience—whether in the laboratory, or the study, or the classroom, or on the street corner—is to be jealously guarded from the thousand who, believing him wrong, would deny his right to search and his right to speak the truth. On that fact we have built a free and great and diverse society.

"We are a nation of differences," the President said, "and the values and principles that protect those differences are the sources of a unity far more lasting and stronger than any contrived harmony could be."

IT IS those democratic values and principles protecting our individual rights and liberties that the Far Right puts in jeopardy. As long as the Far Right seeks to impose its will and its views by the vicious, undemocratic tactics of infiltration, intimidation, and slander, it is the enemy of education and democracy. It is dangerous and damaging to the American school—that strongest stronghold of freedom and democracy.

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