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Combatting

Undemocratic Pressures

On Schools and Libraries

A Guide for Local Communities

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Large cities are not immune. The experiences of St. Louis in 1961 are worth detailing to indicate the broad nature of the attack made and the methods by which communities can defend themselves. What follows is taken from David Mallery's "Teaching about Communism," a publication of the National Association of Independent Schools (1962):

"St. Louis, like many U.S. communities, has had its share of community pressures for this or that tendency, idea or program that 'must be gotten into the schools.' Early in 1961, one of the travelling 'anti-Communist schools' swept into the area and raised a new clamor. One school head speaks now of 'waves of hysterical women who descended on his school before the first day's anti-Communist sessions were even over.' The main interest of the 'waves' who swept down on some of the schools was to conduct 'anti-Communist' classes for the students inside the schools in the various school programs. . . .

"With sudden new charges against teachers, with renewed special attacks on subject matter for speeches, books, class discussions, and with demands from all around to have citizens enter schools to teach classes in 'anti-Communism' to students, the educators themselves had some very real challenges to action. They had been exploring, independently in many cases, the whole problem of teaching about Communism and Democracy, well before this newest 'wave.' But through the summer and fall of 1961 they met informally — school heads, teachers, superintendents from public and independent schools and colleges. . . .

"These convictions were central to the discussions and the planning that summer and fall: that a defensive, alarmist scurrying to resist a new wave of rabble-raising tactics was *not* what was called for in the educational community; that the teaching in the schools was going to continue to be done by the schools' teachers; that planning of subject matter, preparing materials, and scheduling time was going to be done by school people; and that the educational community would re-examine its own approaches and programs dealing both with Communism and Democracy, and would seek to develop plans and materials which would be appropriate, sound, and professionally responsible."

Two important steps were the consequence of these discussions. The Educational Council for Responsible Citizenship was formed, made up of the public schools of the city of St. Louis, the public schools of St. Louis County, the parochial schools of the Catholic and Lutheran churches, the private secondary schools, and St. Louis and Washington Universities. Programs and courses of study were prepared including a

series of lectures for teachers on the Bill of Rights (also sponsored by the St. Louis Bar Association); summer programs for students; and workshops for teachers in an "Institute on Freedom and Communism" (sponsored by St. Louis University and the Navy League of the United States). A radio series on the nature of Communism was presented and St. Louis University was also making plans to televise some of the workshop lectures and discussions.

Under the influence of groups insisting their motives have been entirely patriotic, there has been an increase in recent years in the number of investigations by state legislatures of teachers in state-supported colleges and universities. In some cases the expression of a "controversial" point of view by a teacher in a public talk has led to demands for his dismissal.

Campaigns against teachers may also take place locally. A recent example of this involved a teacher in Paradise, Calif., Mrs. Virginia Franklin, who was charged with subversion because she presented both sides of "controversial" issues to her students. The community was bitterly divided over this case, and the teacher was forced to institute a defamation of character suit.

Pressures on Books

Patriotic and right-wing groups have been increasingly active in attempts to screen textbooks and remove books considered objectionable from school and public libraries. In the five-year period 1958-62 textbooks came under fire in nearly a third of the state legislatures.² In addition, non-professional organizations and publications devoted to reviewing textbooks, from a particular point of view, have grown during this period.

Books are most commonly attacked on the grounds that they are "favorable to Communism," "arouse sentiments contrary to the American way" or are "obscene and undermine sexual morality." Obscenity is sometimes said to be part of a general attempt to destroy the American moral fibre. Books are sometimes evaluated on the basis of how many times certain words appear in the index ("socialism," "classes," "revolution," etc.) By this criterion, it has been pointed out, many anti-Communist books would also have to be removed.

² Jack Nelson and Gene Roberts, Jr. — *The Censors and the Schools*. (Boston: Little Brown and Co.: 1963) p. 20.

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