

# Emancipated Educators

PAUL L. MORRIS

St. Louis.

**L**AST week more than 10,000 men and women, representing leading forces of the educational profession in every section of the country, met in St. Louis at the annual convention of the Department of Superintendence (a division of the National Educational Association). Each year it meets to discuss, debate, talk and go home, but last year at Atlantic City Charles A. Beard struck a new note when he branded Hearst one of the leading subversive agents in American democracy, whom no honest man would touch "with a ten-foot pole." But despite the demands of the liberal delegates, the convention did nothing more than present milk-and-water resolutions.

Far different is the picture presented at St. Louis last week. Speaking before an assemblage of liberal educators banded together in the newly organized John Dewey Society, Professor George S. Counts of Teachers College, Columbia, laid down a barrage that may prove one of the most decisive factors in turning the tide of educational reaction in this country. Giving names and citing facts, he warned American teachers and parents to guard themselves against the insidious influences of William Randolph Hearst, Frank Belgrano, Alfred E. Smith, Father Coughlin, the Daughters of the American Revolution and the American Liberty League.

Hearst uses the old public-utility device of pinning the Communist, Bolshevik label on anyone whom he does not like. Name calling is his special weapon. His notoriously dishonest attempt to label the colleges of the country as Communist is evidence of his duplicity and subversive methods. Hearst is assailing freedom of assembly, speech and press and of moving pictures and radio.

Alfred E. Smith, having "sold out to privilege," has now become the "arch enemy of true education and of all forces working for a finer life of the common man." Father Coughlin is "a past master of vague generalization." The Daughters of the American Revolution have betrayed "the spirit and devotion of their fathers." Theirs is a "thinly-veiled snobbery and protection of privilege." And as for the American Liberty League, the DuPonts, Morgans and Raskobs therein "apparently think that the Revolution was fought to make Long Island safe for polo players."

Dr. Counts told the cheering audience that "the American Liberty League characterizes all those who believe in a real liberty set forth in the Declaration of Independence, as Reds, Bolsheviks, or Communists."

This forthright speech set the pace to the convention, sweeping the more timid

superintendents into a stronger position. While it is true that the resolutions finally adopted did not come up to the promise set by Dr. Counts, nevertheless they represent a distinct victory for the liberal forces in the American schools and colleges. Dr. Charles A. Beard continued the fine work started by Dr. Counts. In a speech filled with scholarly brilliance, he warned that the fascist reaction now closing up the founts of controversial discussion in many schools would tend to sink American education to the level of that found in Italy or Germany. Communism, true knowledge about Russia, the realities of our sordid political picture, all must be dissected and analyzed in the classroom if we are to maintain our pretense of democracy.

Dr. Beard followed up this talk with a pointed telegram to Governor Alfred Landon of Topeka, Kansas, in which he said:

A number of American educators who have followed your career with deep interest would like to ask you one question: "Are you proud to be sponsored by William Randolph Hearst?"

Following this action, George A. Davis, secretary-treasurer of the American Federation of Teachers, wired this Republican presidential aspirant asking if he had balanced his Kansas budget by "reducing funds for education and human relief." Citing the notoriously low salaries paid Kansas school teachers and administrators, Davis asked "if elected president of the United States, would you approve balancing the federal budget by similarly restricting education for American children and relief funds for American families in need?"

Willard E. Givens, executive secretary of the National Education Association, and Clyde R. Miller of Teachers College and of the executive board of the Progressive Education Association, endorsed the telegram. Commenting on the fact that the N.E.A. had backed the Teachers' Federation on this issue, Mr. Givens said, "we must all stand together"—a remarkable advance in the form of a united educational front.

Meanwhile Jouett Shouse, president of the American Liberty League, resenting Dr. Counts' indictment of his organization, challenged him to prove his allegations. The American Liberty League "is committed to the principles of free speech, freedom of the press, freedom of religious worship, the right of peaceable assemblage as basic tenets of American liberty. It upholds the rights as belonging to every citizen, no matter how humble."

Professor Counts immediately wired back instances requested by Mr. Shouse:

You and your lawyers, representing great property interests have attacked several great statutes

enacted by present government to cope with economic crises and protect basic economic liberties of the people. Have you intervened in any one of many cases during the past twelve months involving freedom of speech, freedom of press, freedom of assemblage, freedom of religious worship, freedom of thought and teaching, right to fair trial of working men?

Dr. Counts cited numerous cases: Tom Mooney, Angelo Herndon, the Scottsboro boys, the Gauley Bridge silicosis deaths and instances of more than seventy American workers shot or beaten to death during labor disputes throughout the country in 1935.

"The American Liberty League has the jitters," Dr. Beard said in commenting on what he called "the most significant event of the convention," Shouse's reply to Dr. Counts. "Once you introduce education into the American Liberty League, it will quickly disintegrate."

In another part of the convention a tri-cornered debate took place between former Governor Henry J. Allen of Kansas, Republican; Senator Albin W. Barkley of Kentucky, Democrat; and Norman Thomas, Socialist. Ex-Governor Allen got off on the wrong foot when he evidently tried to soft-soap Thomas by saying he did not regard him as "an objectionable Socialist," and that the Socialist leader might even be of value as "giving some of you a slight inoculation producing a varioloid that will make you immune from real socialism." Thomas replied indignantly that the Socialist program included "compensation and taxation amounting to expropriation in the upper levels." He declared that "Russia has made real progress in making the machine work for society." In the words of The St. Louis Post-Dispatch: "Thomas, opening the program, took a lead in the audience's favor which neither the former Governor Allen nor Senator Barkley succeeded in taking away from him. By the time the three had finished their speeches the applause had made it evident that Thomas had stolen the show."

At Atlantic City last year even a mild resolution on academic freedom was hooted down by the assembled delegates; at St. Louis precisely the opposite occurred. Payson Smith, Massachusetts Commissioner of Education for the last nineteen years, was not reappointed by Governor Curley because, it has been learned, the Commissioner refused to make a deal with the Governor which included reappointment if Dr. Smith would let Mr. Curley fill thirty-five jobs in the Massachusetts educational system with his own political appointees. Self-appointed Red-baiters in the American Legion, goaded by Hearst, were also after Smith's scalp because of his stand against teachers' loyalty oaths. Pressed by the liberal members of

the Department of Superintendence, who were shocked by this disclosure of corruption, brought in a resolution denouncing the political interference in this case. They declared that documented facts on the dismissal made it "difficult to realize that this ever could have happened here in America."

It is true that for every superintendent or educational commissioner fired for political reasons there are at least one hundred classroom teachers fired for the same "offense." But while the Department of Superintendence did not take an active stand in support of the dismissed classroom teachers, nevertheless this outspoken defense of one of their own was a distinct victory for the liberal forces at the convention.

The superintendents furthermore adopted a resolution stating that "we recognize that many of the most critical problems facing the American people today are economic in nature." The principle of tenure for classroom teachers was accepted for the first time in the history of the Department. Adult education is now to be recognized as a function of the public school system. Further, the public school should provide a program which will recognize the needs of youth between the ages of 18 and 25. More federal funds should be allocated to the public schools of this country.

Dr. George D. Strayer of Teachers College presented a "deadly parallel" in the educational life of today, citing our promise to youth, as recorded in the Children's Charter, and our performance, as shown by actual accomplishments. Millions of children are denied adequate educational opportunities, despite the vast potential resources of this country. He also stressed the "fascist" trend in education, embodied in federal control over education through the C.C.C. set-up, the National Youth Administration and other governmental agencies.

Freedom from politics was stressed as well as an interpretation of academic freedom which permits the teacher "complete liberty of political conduct and thought to which he is entitled as an American citizen" and which at the same time obligates the teacher to present all available facts in controversial issues to provide a realistic and accurate picture of American life and problems. Carrying out the practical application of this program, the executive committee of the Department of Superintendence voted an endorsement of the Sisson Bill pending in the House of Representatives which would remove the present rule forbidding school teachers in Washington from teaching or advocating Communism.

The Department of Superintendence's 1936 Yearbook, presented at the convention and adopted almost unanimously, made a powerful defense of the right of teachers to discuss controversial issues in the classroom and to discuss all sides of current topics. It marked a decided step forward in the liberation of American education from the stranglehold of vested interests and minority

pressure groups. This social-studies curriculum, of which Dr. Counts and Dr. Beard are members, laid down as fundamental principles the right of all classroom teachers to conduct their classes free from political or partisan interference. Distressed by the tenor of this yearbook, over which the executive committee had control, it urged a resolution to discontinue future publication of such books. The proposal to abolish such documents in the future was voted down almost unanimously. It was with a rude awakening that the reactionary leaders realized that the rank and file of the Department had gotten out of their hands.

From almost every standpoint this St. Louis meeting was one of the most significant conventions held since the days of Horace Mann. It was truly heartening to all lovers of democracy to find speaker after speaker—educators of national reputation—rising to the defense of teachers in their fight against the Hearsts, the Daughters of the American Revolution and the American Liberty League. Fascist groups in this country have received an acute setback. And there is evidence the educators will continue the offensive during the coming year, keeping the forces of fascism on the run.

Loyalty oaths as one expression of the rising tide of fascism in this country were roundly denounced by educators at many

panel discussions and symposiums held during the week of the convention. William McAndrew, ousted as school superintendent of Chicago because he refused to kowtow to the political whims of the then mayor, Big Bill Thompson, made a stirring defense of the school teacher in the fight against the loyalty oath. Now an editor of School and Society, he presented his own loyalty oath, including in part:

I swear to defend the equal rights of citizens to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. I swear in accordance with American right and duty to favor a change in government when government fails to secure these rights.

Every believer in the united front movement should be heartened by the excellent advances made at St. Louis. Traditionally a conservative body with little or no root in the soil of the laboring classes, with entangling interests interwoven among the bankers, businessmen and moneyed groups of the community, the Department of Superintendence has stepped forward into the realities of American society today. As was made perfectly clear in one of the debates, if an educator of national standing can be ousted on a flimsy political pretext, what can the \$5,000 a year superintendent from Needles, California, or the \$2,500 a year administrator from Yuma, Arizona, expect?

**You asked for it!  
Here it is:**

"THE WORLD GONE MAD," by Robert Forsythe, aroused intense interest when it was first published in The New Masses. It was praised far and wide as a fine presentation of the world chaos existing today and the way out. Dozens of readers urged us to reprint the article in pamphlet form. We have done it, and here it is!

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# Our Readers' Forum

## A Swing Enthusiast

One of your newest features, the department on music, was not only a surprise, but a real treat and delight. Most of it was not new to me, since the good fortune has been mine, to have written music for the bands of which Johnson spoke.

His promise to list the best records in the future will really be a help to many of the lovers of swing music who are very often misled by the publicity sheets put out by the recording companies. I have yet to hear a Benny Goodman or Fletcher Henderson or Louis Armstrong or Duke Ellington record that fails to delight the swing enthusiast. And yet there are so many people, who despite their love for swing music, seem only to know of the mechanical Casa Loma, Dorsey or Noble orchestras, expressing surprise when told about such outfits of *real* swing, such as . . . Red Norvo, Teddy Wilson, and Fats Waller.

I'm sure Johnson will lose no time in pointing out and revealing many things pertaining to music and musicians, heretofore unmentioned anywhere.

GEORGE BASSMAN.

## "Jazz Is Empty Music"

Regarding the article on "The Development of 'Swing'" by Henry Johnson. I believe the whole business of jazz is taken too seriously. As a professional jazz-pianist I have always considered it as some sort of an organized racket on the false basis of its being a neglected branch of the higher arts. The business—and it is nothing else but a business—is conducted by a group of musicians inferior in ability, who could do nothing better if they tried to.

I am referring to the composers and publishers whose sole aim seems to be in getting the Almighty Dollar. Songs are hatched as fast as they can be printed. They come and go so quickly that the ordinary fellow who makes his living playing them finds it impossible to remember them. This was not so about ten years ago when a song would stay on the market for about six months. The profit motive is the leading influence today, as it was then, but on a sharper basis.

The publishing houses take their jazz seriously. The establishments have become metamorphosed into bizarre salons with all the dignity and gravity of funeral parlors. Ere jazz became the Schubertian lyric it is considered today, they were tickled to death to hand out orchestrations to anyone who would simply promise to give the song a plug. Try and get one today. You will be told that the free list has been discontinued; orchestrations are fifty cents each.

The explanation is simple. Jazz, as it is practised by these mazuma-mad musicians, is a lucrative racket. From the smallest song-plugger to Jerome Kern, who still continues writing this tripe (he controls one of the biggest publishing firms on Broadway), the main interest lies in making as much money as they can from the masses who buy the songs and from starving musicians who are forced to buy the orchestrations in order to get dance jobs.

Jazz is still empty music. It is the product of a decaying civilization, wherein the money-making instinct is entrenched even in its "greatest" song-writers. The people who dance to it will some day realize that jazz was manufactured for them as just another soul-soother.

IRVING SCHLEIN.

## Headquarters on Wheels

We are in search of an old farmhouse we can use as a base of operation and research in connection with the building of the Farmer-Labor Party. We want to equip a covered wagon auto to travel over the back roads of Vermont, distributing Farmer-Labor literature and speaking in village and Grange halls, and making a survey of the Vermont farm situation, working out from such a farm. Will any

reader who is interested in assisting us, please communicate with Jack Wilgus, 249 North Main Street, Barre, Vermont. This is a suggestion to readers which may result in a constructive as well as pleasurable way of spending the spring and summer "far from the madding crowd."

Barre, Vermont

JACK WILGUS.

## A Cure for Prejudice

College professors are not the only recipients of the bounty of The National Republic, the fascist publication exposed in Alfred Hirsch's article in your issue of March 10. About five months ago history teachers—I am one of them—in the New York City high schools also began to receive The National Republic free of charge. In addition we get weekly bulletins on "subversive radical activities" and patrician suggestions on how to teach Americanism of The National Republic jingo brand.

I have always been liberal in my political philosophy, but a steady dose of this fascist organ awakened me with a bang. You cannot fight the viciousness and stupidity of The National Republic with liberalism. I began to read THE NEW MASSES to get the other side of the story. Today I am a radical and grateful to Walter Steele, Dr. Dorsey and the other luminaries of that Red-baiting sheet for unwittingly showing me the light. However, I do not underestimate the danger of circulating such distortion of the truth and such hysteria among the members of the middle class. It is up to us to spread the counteracting influence of THE NEW MASSES in this group.

The February, 1936 issue of The National Republic congratulates the University of Pittsburgh for being blacklisted by the American Association of University Professors following the dismissal of Professor Turner. "Hurrah for the University of Pittsburgh. Let more institutions follow its stand—and the threatened revolution might never take place." In the same issue there is an editorial on Mary Heaton Vorse's *Footnote to Folly*, with particular stress on the famine the author found in Russia—"children shriveled beyond recognition," etc. Two important facts I read in the book are carefully ignored. First, the time referred to is *not the present*, but 1918 and

1919 just after the World War, when the same famine conditions existed throughout all of Central and Eastern Europe. Second, the children of Russia and of Hungary (at that time also a Communist country) starved longer than those of Germany and Austria because the American Relief Administration, for *political* reasons, delayed in furnishing relief to Communist lands.

Shades of that Great Humanitarian, Herbie Hoover—The National Republic's pride and joy!

TEACHER.

## What? No Dictaphones?

Congratulations! That last Spivak article on Nazi Germany scored a bull's-eye. And you can take that from Aryan paradise direct.

You may perhaps know that there are special short-wave broadcasts every day from Germany to America. These programs addressed to the American continent as a whole are designed in particular to fan the nostalgia of German Americans and are interspersed throughout with reference to United States policy towards the Reich.

Well, tonight I listened in on station DJC—Berlin, Germany. As the closing remark on the day's program, the announcer referred in English to an article on Germany he had read in *Current Review*—an article condensed from THE NEW MASSES—an article by a fellow named Spivak. The article was just a pack of lies and fairy tales. Spivak was just—"a dirty fellow." If Mr. John Spivak returned, the announcer—his nickname is Ribbi—would volunteer to prove to him that dictaphones are not planted in hotel rooms.

The announcer then asked all friends of Germany to bring pressure on the American government to prevent such articles which endanger the good and peaceful relationships of the two countries.

That, of course, would be quite a simple matter if America were coordinated like the Reich.

GEORGE KAIT.

## Marxism and Freudianism

I have just finished reading the fourth volume of Vardis Fisher's tetralogy, the volume called *No Villain Need Be*. On pages 348-358 Vardis Fisher gives his argument against Communism. His viewpoint is that of the Freudian.

Somewhat I feel that his refutation of Communism is weak; but knowing nothing about Freudianism, and comparatively little of Marxism, I am not able to analyze his argument as I would like to.

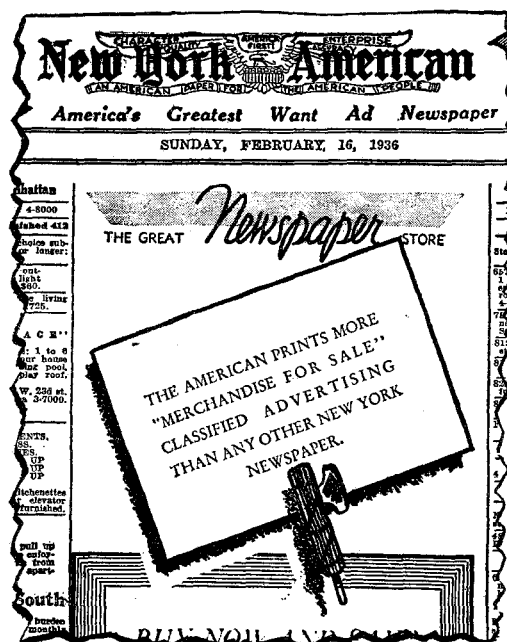
I would personally appreciate it greatly and feel that most of your readers would also be greatly interested, if one of your staff could answer Vardis Fisher's argument from a dialectic viewpoint. I feel that it is of particular interest as even Auden and Spender are trying to combine Freudianism and Marxism as a solution of the economic crisis.

Thanking you very kindly, I am yours sincerely,  
Berkeley, Calif.

LOLA LAMONT.

It is perfectly clear that as a sensitive and suffering man—he discovered his personal plight openly in his significantly titled volume of essays *The Neurotic Nightingale*—Vardis Fisher recognizes the misery of the contemporary world and would like to look forward to a world less doomed to frustration. In that respect his aims tally with that of the revolutionary movement.

In an early issue we shall publish a review which Jack Conroy has prepared on Vardis Fisher's new volume. Conroy does not concentrate on the problems of Marxism and Freudianism, but limits his discussion to the literary aspects of Vardis Fisher's work. However, we fully agree with Miss Lamont that a full discussion of the subject would have interest and value. We hope to publish such an article in a forthcoming issue.—THE EDITORS.



A reader who sends us the clipping reproduced above wants "to know why Hearst chooses to use the fasces—Mussolini's party symbol—to advertise the virtues of his so-called American."