

An Appeal to Reason and Conscience

In Defense of the Right of Freedom Of Inquiry in the United States

On June 8 the Board of Superintendents of New York City schools closed the schools to THE NATION, the oldest liberal magazine in the United States.

This action was taken without advance notice to THE NATION or to the people of the city, without hearing, and announcement of any kind, either to the magazine or to the public.

The only opportunity afforded to the magazine to defend itself, or to citizens to be heard, was at a meeting of the Board from which the press was excluded, and which was called as the result of public protests some weeks after the decision had accidentally become known.

Following this proceeding, the

board reaffirmed its decision by unanimous vote. Other communities thereupon followed suit by similar unilateral action. In Massachusetts, THE NATION was banned from the state's teachers' colleges by a public official who admitted he had not, at the time of the banning, himself investigated the reason given by the

Stifling Free Expression

(Editor's Note: We're devoting our entire page today to the presenting of a single issue. This, we know, is a bit unusual. However, we feel completely justified. In our opinion, the issue at stake here is one about which each student at the University should feel vitally concerned.)

What would you say if the state board of higher education were to suddenly ban a certain magazine from the shelves of the University library because the board members had decided that the magazine, in their opinion, had printed objectionable material which you should not read?

You'd holler, wouldn't you? Some one of you would very likely organize a committee to fight for the removal of the ban.

On June 8, the board of Superintendents of the New York City schools shut its doors to THE NATION, the oldest liberal magazine in the United States. Monday of this week 107 prominent Americans, acting as a special committee, made public a request for the lifting of the ban by issuing a 1700-word document entitled "An Appeal to Reason and Conscience."

Included among the signers of the document is Palmer Hoyt, University graduate, former editor of the Portland Oregonian, and now publisher and editor of the Denver Post. Other members of the committee include such outstanding Americans as Henry Steele Commager, professor at Columbia university; Dorothy Canfield Fisher, noted author; Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick, religious leader; Sumner Welles, former undersecretary of state; Dr. Robert M. Hutchins, chancellor of the University of Chicago, and Dr. Zechariah Chafee, Jr., professor, Harvard law school.

Chairman of the committee is Archibald MacLeish, well-known author-poet, former assistant secretary of state, and United States representative in UNESCO.

The ban was placed on THE NATION because of a series of articles by Paul Blanshard, for many years commissioner of investigation and accounts in New York under Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, in which Blanshard described and criticized the official position of the Catholic church in such matters as education, science, medicine, marriage, divorce, democracy, and fascism.

In challenging the New York board, the document, which appears on this page, draws striking attention to the dangerous consequences to the country if the premises on which the ban was based are accepted.

Should these premises be accepted as precedents for the establishing of similar rulings in the United States, this country might one day find itself marching swiftly down the disastrous road toward fascism.

A fellow named Hitler not so many years ago used similar methods to stifle opposition to his dreams for a glorious new Germany.

New York board for its action. The reason was the publication by THE NATION in 1947 and 1948 of a series of articles by Paul Blanshard, for many years Commissioner of Investigations



PALMER HOYT ... he signed document.

and Accounts of the City of New York in the La Guardia administration.

Mr. Blanshard's articles described and criticized the official position of the Catholic church in such matters as education, science, medicine, marriage, divorce, democracy and fascism. The board stated that there were passages in these articles which a Catholic would find objectionable on grounds of faith.

It is the opinion of the undersigned that the action of the New York Board of Superintendents raises an issue of the greatest gravity to the people of the city and of the country.

IT IS NOT AN ISSUE BETWEEN CATHOLICS AND NON-CATHOLICS.

There are Catholics among us and none of us, whether Catholic or not, have been moved to protest by reason of hostility to the Catholic faith. Neither is the issue raised a mere issue of fact with regard to the articles themselves.

We agree with the board that there are sincere Catholics and men of good will who object on grounds of faith to certain statements in Mr. Blanshard's articles. Indeed, some of us who are not Catholics disagree with certain of Mr. Blanshard's statements.

The issue as we see it is the issue of principle which the board's action, and the board's statements in defense of its action, present.

The question before the board was not the question of the suitability of THE NATION as a text book in the city's schools.

The question was whether THE NATION, which had long been one of the periodicals available to New York City students, should continue to be available to them.

Destructive Principles

In ruling that it should not, and giving its publication of the Blanshard articles as justification, the board in effect enunciated two propositions both of which in our opinion are contrary to American ideas of freedom and destructive of American principles.

The first is the proposition that any published material regarded, or which could be regarded, as objectionable on grounds of faith or creed by any group in the community should be excluded from

the community's schools and school libraries.

The second is the proposition that the appearance in any publication of material of this kind justifies the suppression in schools and school libraries of the publication as a whole. In the case of a periodical this means that the past publication of such material justifies the suppression of future issues regardless of the general character and record of the periodical.

The vice of the second of these two propositions is apparent upon its face. The exclusion from public institutions, by public officials on the basis of particular material published in the past, rather than on the basis of the character of the publication as a whole, cannot be defended even as censorship.

It is extra-judicial punishment pure and simple, and it involves a power of intimidation and possible blackmail in officials of government which no free society can tolerate and which a free press could not long survive.

Vicious Proposition

To permit public officials, in their unlimited, extra-judicial discretion, to stigmatize an established and respected magazine or newspaper as unfit for students to read because of the publication of a specific article or series of articles, or of particular paragraphs in a specific article or series, is to confer an arbitrary and dictatorial power which is wholly foreign to the American tradition and to the laws and constitution in which the American tradition is expressed.

The first proposition—that any publication objectionable on



RICHARD L. NEUBERGER ... helped form committee

grounds of faith to any group in the community should be suppressed in the schools—though more plausible on its face, is equally vicious in fact. It is a repudiation, on one side, of the principle of the separation of church and state.

The meaning of that latter tenet, so far as education is concerned, is that no church may use the public schools as instruments of its propaganda. To give the churches of the country, or any of their members who might seek to exercise it, the power to determine by simple veto what shall not be available to students in the public schools, or worse, for public officials to exclude automatically anything any group might be expected to wish excluded, is to do by negative action what the Constitution and courts forbid by positive action.

The argument offered in defense of this revolutionary proposal is apparently that religion

cannot be criticized in American education.

THERE IS NOTHING IN AMERICAN LAW OR IN THE AMERICAN TRADITION WHICH SAYS THAT RELIGION CANNOT BE CRITICIZED IN EDUCATION, NOR DOES THE PRINCIPLE OF THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE INVOLVE ANY SUCH CONSEQUENCE.

On the contrary, the American Republic was founded, and the

Signers of Document

Samuel Hopkins Adams, Dr. Henry A. Atkinson, George Axelle, Dr. Wade Crawford Barclay, Ralph Bennett, Mrs. Mary McLeod Bethune, George Biddle, Sarah Gibson Blanding, Isaiah Bowman, Charles C. Burlingham, Erwin D. Canham, Robert K. Carr, Zechariah Chafee Jr.

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Moss Hart, Arthur Garfield Hays, Rt. Rev. Henry W. Hobson, William Ernest Hocking, Hamilton Holt, Mildred McAfee Horton, Charles H. Houston, Byrn J. Hovde, Palmer Hoyt, Charles E. Hughes Jr., Robert M. Hutchins, Samuel Guy Inman, Alvin Johnston, Charles S. Johnson, Howard M. Jones, Alice V. Keliher, Dorothy Kenyon, William Heard Kilpatrick, Leon Kroll, Christopher LaFarge, Dr. Harry Laidler, Herbert Lehman, Monte Lemann, Max Lerner, Edward C. Lindeman, Alani Locke, Robert S. Lynd, Marshall MacDuffie, Dr. John A. Mackay.

Archibald MacLeish, Thomas Mann, Benjamin E. Mays, Ralph E. McGill, Millicent Carey McIntosh, Alexander Meiklejohn, Ernest O. Melby, Frederick Melcher, Clyde R. Miller, Perry Miller, Lewis Mumford, Edward R. Murrow, Allan Nevins, Reinhold Niebuhr, Howard W. Odum, Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam, Bishop Edward L. Parsons, Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, Mrs. Henry P. Russell, Rose Russell, Rose Schneiderman, Budd Schulberg, Lisa Sergio, Charles Seymour, Dr. Guy Emery Shippler, Paul C. Smith, Arthur B. Springarn, William B. Spofford Jr., Justice Meier Steinbrink, Rex Stout, Clarence Streit, Harold Taylor, Norris L. Tibbets, Carl Van Doren, Mark Van Doorn, James P. Warburg, Goodwin Watson, Sumner Welles, Gene Weltfish, James Waterman Wise, Dr. Stephen S. Wise, Louise Leonard Wright.

American continent was settled, by people whose actions were in large part an expression of their criticism of certain established religions.

The truth is that the suppression of ideas impoverishes human life and warps the human mind in an increasing and progressive sickness. Those who practice it are led by the logic of one exclusion to the tragedy of the next.

If the suppression of THE NATION for having published the Blanshard articles is allowed to stand, and if the propositions upon which it is justified are accepted, the consequences to the schools, to the press, and to the vitality of American freedom may well be very serious indeed.

Newspapers and periodicals will be obliged to omit news and comment which any group in any denomination, Catholic or other, regards as objectionable or run the risk of being suppressed in the public schools, with all that such suppression means in terms of the loss of good name and good will.

No Formula

The standard of education will become the teaching, not of the truth, but of that part of the truth to which no group objects—with the result that the bigotry and ignorance of minorities will dictate the knowledge of the whole people. Scientific works containing accepted scientific facts about the shape of the earth, the history of the universe and the functions of the human body, objectionable to various denominational groups, will be withdrawn.

The events of the last ten years should have taught us all—the New York Board of Superintendents included—that there is no escape from the difficult problems of our time by suppression.

(Please turn to page seven.)

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