

get everything that is necessary for fulfilling their task, whether increased pay for teachers, new schools, expanded guidance programs or what have you.

A survey like this will help bring a lot of people into the schools who haven't set foot into them since they were kicked out or handed their diplomas—the newspaper editor, for instance. We've learned this in Meriden: we know that our readers like to see pictures of school activities and like to read stories about what's going on in the individual classrooms. Even in Meriden, where we devote a minimum of one full page of news and pictures to the schools each week, I'm not sure the

public understands the work of the schools. They've got to learn at first-hand that the schools today are different from what they were 20 or more years ago, just as the world is different, and that the schools are better than they were 20 years ago, even if the world is not.

Citizen participation in education is essentially our goal. It seems to me that a citizens' survey is a primary step that must be taken to obtain it. At the very least it would be an instrument for introducing the teacher to the citizen, and for allaying the misapprehensions that each has about the other.

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## *An Appeal for Common Sense*

AGNES E. MEYER

Are current unjustified attacks on schools a modern outbreak of "vigilantism"? A keen observer of the American social scene analyzes these attacks and suggests positive means of meeting them.

**I**T IS a great relief these days to get away from the tensions of the nation's capital and to look at our many problems from the sane vantage point of life in a local community. It is especially heartening to discuss some of these problems in a county which is justly famous throughout the land as an independent, courageous community singularly competent to turn its ideals into a working reality. I am grateful to the American Association of University Women for inviting me and giving me this opportunity to recall the lasting contributions that have been made to the preservation of some of our noblest traditions.

I am all the happier to do this be-

cause the shrill voices which have been getting the headlines of late have disturbed the even tenor of our ways and tempted us to answer the violent people with equal violence. Yet the natural fears and conflicts of an endangered society can only be assuaged by the application of self-control, intelligence and native American common sense which characterize the highly literate population of Arlington and Americans as a whole. This American common sense is derived from the daily necessity of solving dilemmas, annoyances and defeats; it teaches us to accept difficulties without too much fear or anxiety. If we are more than usually disturbed today, it is because in the past we have

taken our heritage of freedom too much for granted. It seemed safely enshrined not only in our daily lives but in the Bill of Rights. Now we have suddenly awakened to the fact that freedom must be recaptured by every generation and that it will endure only as long as we stand ready to defend it at any cost, however high. Thus the cooperative endeavors you have made here toward social progress are of especial importance today. For the freedoms we all cherish will be lost or preserved not in Washington or in our state governments, but in the local communities where people live and strive, succeed or fail, as the case may be.

But though very definite threats to the freedoms we have always taken for granted do exist today, let us not exaggerate the danger. We tend to forget momentarily the great progress toward the extension of human freedom we have made during the past generation in ways almost too numerous to mention. We have underpinned old age, the destitute, and needy families with social security; improvements in the fields of health and education have been amazing; and the Negro with whose disadvantages Europe is always reproaching us has possibly made greater progress toward equal rights than ever before in our history. If we remember the vitality our democracy has shown under the stress of wars both hot and cold, it will strengthen our faith in ourselves and help us to see the real dangers that confront our society not so much as a menace but as another challenge which must be met with the same fortitude and the same calm and constructive attitude. We must trust ourselves and each other as never before

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and thus strengthen the faith of the country as a whole in its principles, its hopes and beliefs. We must speak our minds fearlessly, for in so doing we discover that there are in ourselves and others human resources upon which we have never yet drawn. Nothing is more contagious, more inspiring than courage.

### **Conspiracy Against Schools**

At the same time I do not wish to minimize the real dangers to our democracy. And I shall select one of these for discussion which interests you and me most, the sinister attacks upon our public school system. For I think it is a clearly established fact that there has developed throughout our country in recent years—from Scarsdale, New York to Pasadena, California—a nationwide, more or less organized conspiracy to undermine the faith of the American people in our public school system. When I use the word conspiracy I mean a planned, concerted effort on the part of various individuals and organizations, the source of whose ample funds is unknown, to attack public education with identical, monotonously repeated accusations that have just enough truth to make their falsehood seem plausible. These enemies of our schools have ob-

viously borrowed the tactics of the communists and fascists who maintain that if only a lie is repeated often enough with sufficient impudence, many people will finally believe it.

It should not surprise us that subversive elements who wish to hurt democracy should single out our unique public school system as their deadliest enemy. For public education is the heart-beat of our nation that daily renews and purifies the blood stream of the democratic body politic. It has helped to make our nation great, tolerant and hopeful, because it has released human talents and capacities in our country to a greater extent than has happened anywhere else in the whole course of human history. Thus if our public education is successfully weakened or destroyed, so is democracy itself.

That there may be a few master minds behind this campaign is indicated, as I have said, by the constant repetition of the same propaganda using almost identical arguments, language and slogans, distributed often in vicious literature originating from a single source:

1. The schools do not teach the 3 R's.
2. The teachers and the textbooks are communistic or at best socialistic.
3. Progressive education breeds undisciplined children if not delinquents and criminals.
4. The schools are godless.

That is the whole gamut of these accusations. They have been answered again and again with irrefutable proof to the contrary. But the answers are ignored. For the type of mentality with which we are dealing in this battle

to defend democratic institutions is impervious to reasonable persuasion and moral principles.

One of the most regrettable results of these unjust criticisms is that the friends of the public school system have been jockeyed into a defensive position. They scarcely dare to make constructive criticisms themselves, lest they give aid and comfort to the enemy. Thereupon the enemies shout: "Oh, so you think the public schools are perfect!" Thus do the falsehoods multiply one upon the other, and time and energies that should be used to improve our public schools are wasted because the honest critics of our educational system are forced into a state of siege mentality.

To be sure, our colleges and universities have also recently come under attack from members of Congress. But these Congressional persecutions of our educators would never have taken place, if the witch hunts on the local level had not been so successful in sowing mutual distrust and thereby destroying peace and orderly progress. In other words we would not now have a few dangerous Hitlers in Congress if it were not for the fact that we have a flock of little Hitlers in almost every locality. The situation reminds me of a little-known Calvin Coolidge story. A man complained to President Coolidge that a certain Senator was a scoundrel. "Well," replied Coolidge calmly, "there are a lot of scoundrels in the country and they are entitled to some representation."

Thus the whole crux of our strategy to protect the educational system is to meet the attacks in our local communities. The Congressional Hitlers must be criticized, opposed and ridiculed,

since ridicule is one of the strongest weapons. How can we remain silent while these members of the Senate and House maltreat honest American citizens, disrupt the work of Congress, and challenge the executive powers of the Administration? And no less serious, why should we allow these anti-democratic members of Congress to defame our country and ruin the prestige of our nation in every foreign land? "How long will America stand for this?" asks the British journalist Francis Williams in the *News Chronicle*. He says of our Congressional lunatic-fringe: "The moral attitudes they depend upon and exploit matter not only to America but to the whole free world. And those of us who hold as our strongest article of international faith the need for the closest bonds of fidelity between Britain, the Commonwealth and the United States have an obligation to tell our friends in America just how much damage those attitudes are doing to the cause of freedom everywhere."

### **Modern Vigilantism not Needed**

I mention these national and international repercussions merely to point out the full seriousness of the situation we face. But I come back to my theme by stating as my belief that the few destructive members of Congress are not going to change their evil tactics until they hear from the grass roots. Not even the leaders of the new Administration will be able to cope with them successfully, for no truly democratic statesman can afford to resort to punitive action. Yet force is the only thing the authoritarian mentality respects. Only the voters who elected these incipient dictators can use power

—the democratic power of the ballot—to bring them to their senses and persuade them to renounce their present tactics.

To oppose these irrational individuals successfully on a local basis, we must understand their psychology, for we are contending with deep psychopathic factors. They are mostly people who because of their own emotional difficulties have never been able to relate themselves to the community and are now revenging themselves upon a society which they feel has rejected them. They are people filled with hatred because they feel insecure, lonely and slighted, and they satisfy this hatred by the systematic destruction of situations and confidence and mutual trust in order to benefit by the general confusion to acquire power for themselves. These Americans who see themselves as the insulted and injured are not of any particular economic or social level. There are among them some of our rootless intellectuals, many of whom formerly found refuge in "America First," and now feel more adrift than ever since the majority of Americans have learned that our nation must defend human freedom not only here at home but throughout the world. The only satisfaction of these disgruntled elements is in destruction of the community solidarity of which they cannot make themselves a part. They are incapable of loyalty to any group—not even to the political party which elects them to office. And their anti-communism is nothing but a screen for their hatred of the sound, honest, stable members of society. Therefore, the conservatives make a deadly mistake when they think that these people are

a bulwark against communism. The German industrialists made the same miscalculation concerning Hitler. The real hatred of our professional anti-communists is precisely for the conservatives themselves whom they envy their respectability and the fact that society looks up to them. That is why they attack such patriotic, honorable and successful men as General Marshall, Secretary Dulles, Senator Knowland, Charles Bohlen, Bishop Oxnam and others on the Federal level and, on the local level, that emblem of all that is sound and good and essentially conservative, the public schools.

It is a desperate contest the nation faces in coping with these elements, for either they must break down through self-defeat, or they will break down everybody else. They are "dead-end kids" with whom every social worker and teacher is familiar, adolescents who are getting square with a world which they feel has never been fair to them. That is also why they use the childish device of name-calling whenever they are criticized.

In dealing with these maladjusted members of our society, we are baffled and handicapped by a bad conscience. For they are the result of the weaknesses in our society, of its extreme competitiveness, of its intense striving for social and economic status, and of its total neglect in the past of children who could not stand these pressures. Our worship of success creates bitterness in the unsuccessful. And these embittered monstrosities, without faith in love and kindness, without respect for human beings or for any of the values that we cherish, these men who seek success whatever the cost, are a reproach to us

because they are the prototypes of our American vices.

Furthermore, even the legitimate demands of democracy are a strain upon the weak, for it calls for self-discipline, and the sacrifice of the will to power for the common good and for the establishment of a high group civilization. Thus it is not surprising that in times of danger that call for even greater sacrifices, many self-centered individuals seek to destroy a society that demands too much of them.

Therefore it is a mistake to characterize these elements as types of American fascism. They are a modern version of vigilantism, a role that had dignity in our frontier days because the early vigilantes were filling a real need before law and order had been established. But they have no place and no legitimate function in our present society. What these modern vigilantes want is to establish their own law and domination for the law and the cooperative behavior of an orderly democracy.

### **An Outstanding School System**

Thus we only make martyrs of these psychopathic characters if we gang up on them as disturbers of the peace. The role of the martyr would only be used as another asset and as justification of all that they are doing. We only hurt ourselves and our objectives if we suppress these anti-democratic forces with hostile methods. The most useful lesson we can give these vigilantes whether in Congress or in the local communities is that true Americans refuse to use coercive power in the war of ideas. The best weapon we have lies in strengthening community solidarity through im-

provement of our school-community relationships which keep open the free communication between all citizens and prevent exactly what the vigilantes want, the fragmentation of our society. That is also the reason why the communists take great delight in the activities of the vigilantes. For the more they confuse us with attacks on the schools and the more we allow ourselves to be driven into a merely defensive attitude, the better the communists can fish in these troubled waters.

You can readily see from this analysis of the vigilante mentality, why it was a delight to me to get reacquainted with the steady progress toward closer school-community cooperation that has been made in Arlington. It has been said of Americans that we lack philosophic and political theories which can be used as a battle cry against the totalitarian ideologists. But this assuredly does not apply to the field of education. It has been accepted in all of our school systems that democracy, as we know it, is the highest form of government because it seeks to develop the latent potentialities of all of its citizens. We do not regard democracy as just another form of government, but as a continually expanding method of living together. Thus our educational system is an institution which has grown out of the historical soil in which it was rooted and has become indistinguishable from democracy itself.

This philosophy of our democratic schools is implemented differently by different educators since they themselves necessarily vary in intelligence, imagination and administrative skill. But I can say without exaggeration that the Arlington school system, given the

handicaps with which it began six years ago, is one of the finest examples in the country of the application of our American principles of education. And it has made this astounding progress in so short a time because the citizens of Arlington, the Board of Education they elected, the school administrators and the teachers have all pulled their weight in the boat and have done it in unison. Increasing mutual confidence among all of these elements was an important factor in the actual accomplishments.

To an observer like myself it seems that the superior quality of the Arlington Board of Education has been of value far beyond anything the county as a whole as yet realizes. I have a fairly large acquaintance with such boards and I know of none that exceeds this one in the technical education, the varied professions represented and the experiences in administration that are to be found among the five members of the Arlington School Board. The devotion which the Board has shown to its onerous duties and the respect which it has earned have never been more important to the schools than at present when almost all of them, sooner or later, are confronted with criticism and attacks.

Equally important in the rapid progress of what used to be a neglected educational system was the appointment of first-rate school administrators and supervisors who improved the whole situation by able leadership. Together with the specialists and assistant teachers who were selected with great care, this battery of experts have pulled together a school program which was formerly limited to the 3 R's until it has developed into a curriculum that is

comparable to the highest standards. Furthermore, the system became one of even quality, a matter of greater justice to all the children of a county whose schools used to vary from good to bad.

Of especial value has been the program of in-service training which I attended some weeks ago, where small and large groups of teachers were enthusiastic about this opportunity to grow in their profession under expert guidance. It was an education for me to see the various groups and their leaders arrive at new ideas in vocational guidance, music, mathematics, physical education and other branches of the rich curriculum. It was like a poem—an American poem of mutual confidence, mutual respect and the resultant harmony of fine minds working together toward common goals. The flow of ideas back and forth, the discussions that took place at these workshops constitute a truly democratic school system in which the learning process is continuous for the pupils, their teachers and administrators. No wonder the morale of the teachers has been transformed since last I made a study of these schools, and morale of the teaching staff is as important today as adequate salaries for holding teachers and for recruiting new ones. Every human being is attracted to an organization where his work is appreciated and where he has the opportunity to rise in his profession through increasing competence. Nothing could be a greater asset at this period of acute teacher shortage.

### **Citizen Participation Is Essential**

To be sure, it has taken an increased budget to provide this expert leadership and the workshops, but it was on

the whole the most economical way of achieving quickly an excellent and varied curriculum, taught by people who are daily achieving greater professional skill.

These remarkable innovations have aroused interest and favorable comment far beyond the reaches of Arlington County in various professional publications. But in these comments there has never been sufficient appreciation of the fact that the Board of Education and the school authorities were successful in these experiments because they took the parents and the general public with them every step of the way. And if I were to single out only one feature of the Arlington schools for commendation it would be the broad area of citizen participation that they have been able to achieve through numerous committees, councils and advisory groups who have assisted in the formulation of the curriculum, in the selection of textbooks and in other contributions to individual schools. For the local P.T.A.'s the usual speeches which have no relationship to immediate school problems have become obsolete. Fathers as well as mothers attend the meetings to discuss educational issues and to study the problems constantly arising in a dynamic school program. It has become a generally accepted theory throughout our country that we should have community-centered schools, but seldom have I encountered that democratic ideal so thoroughly implemented as it is in Arlington. And the results have been all the more constructive because this county is fortunate in having among its citizens probably a higher percentage of skilled, professional talents than most other counties.

For example, the whole battle concerning "progressive education" was headed off by the active cooperation on curriculum and textbooks of a unique organization called "The Parents Council on Instruction." When parents meet regularly to discuss with the associate superintendent what kind of education they want for their children, what philosophy the school should follow, and what textbooks should be used, the whole community feels involved in its school program and is ready to defend it, however progressive or modern, against the criticisms of people who yearn for "the good old days" and the little school house which unfortunately was red. The ironical thing is that these people who see the present educational methods as hopelessly unregenerate are by no means a good advertisement for the old-fashioned kind of education they now idealize. But Arlington County is to be congratulated for the way in which it has taken most of them tactfully into camp and gone serenely on its way. The parents and citizens who have achieved this truly democratic victory have given a useful lesson in political action of the wisest kind to many less alert communities. They also learned that democratic action is far more effective than that of the rival ideologies of the left

or right with which it has to contend.

These schools have been transformed into a second home for children because both work and play have been shared by the parents, themselves, and by that larger family, the community as a whole. The learning process has a serious content and meaning because it is replete with life, with the real life of the county, the nation and the world. In such a happy setting the child retains the courage to be himself as he feels his abilities expanding. And he rejoices the more in his own progress because it is shared by his classmates and his family.

We talk often of the American way of life as if it were something finished and perfected. It is a way because it beckons us onward to ever greater heights of achievement. And the way that each local community finds of triumphing over the wave of reaction with which it is now afflicted will decide what the world thinks of us. This is another era when we should say of ourselves what Emerson said of the American people over a hundred years ago: "We are not minors and invalids in a protected corner, not cowards fleeing before a revolution, but guides, redeemers, and benefactors, obeying the Almighty effort and advancing on Chaos and the Dark."

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*WHEN men have realized that time has upset many fighting faiths, they may come to believe even more than they believe the very foundations of their own conduct that the ultimate good desired is better reached by free trade in ideas—that the best test of truth is the power of thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market, and that truth is the only ground upon which their wishes safely can be carried out. That at any rate is the theory of our Constitution. . . .*

—JUSTICE HOLMES in *United States vs. Abrams* 250 U. S. 630, 1919.

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