


8-26-1960

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8/26/60

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Key Speech File

Proposed Statement by
Lewis F. Powell, Jr.
Richmond, Virginia
House of Delegates, ABA
August , 1960

Statement In Support Of Proposal To
Teach International Communism

About two years ago, Dr. and Mrs. Overstreet were impelled to write their remarkable book, "What We Must Know About Communism," by the appalling lack of understanding -- indeed deep ignorance -- of the nature of Communism and the scope of its threat to western civilization. In this book, which every public official and every school teacher should read, the Overstreets analyze the history, character and techniques of the menacing new force called Communism -- a force which has never deviated from its relentless purpose to destroy democracy and freedom.

Dr. Conant's provocative little book, "The Child, The Parent And The State," although not a study of Communism, also sheds disquieting light -- not only on the wide-spread lack of understanding of the peril which confronts western civilization, but also upon what he calls the "remarkably care-free and complacent" attitude of the people. Dr. Conant had just completed an extensive survey of American high schools, and although his generalizations were not directed merely to those

in education, it is clear (as he put it) that he found little "feeling of urgency" on this subject in the schools of elsewhere.

As recently as August 22, the New York Times, commenting on a study released by Mr. Nixon, said:

"Certainly all serious observers of the current scene, including Mr. Kennedy, can agree with Mr. Nixon that one of our major weaknesses in the struggle with Communism 'is lack of adequate understanding of the character of the challenge which Communism presents.'"

These are generalizations with which most people are inclined to agree. Let me come now to specifics. The press has recently afforded several examples of the shocking inadequacy of the average American's comprehension of Communism.

The U-2 episode is perhaps the most striking recent example. Volumes of abuse have been heaped upon our Government -- not merely by our enemies and wavering allies, but by the press, many politicians, and most disconcerting of all, by the man in the street.

I do not here suggest that all aspects of the U-2 case, after the plane was forced down, were handled with consummate skill. There were no doubt areas for fair criticism, and one must also allow for the American past-time of "second guessing" everyone from baseball pitchers to Presidents.

But I am concerned by lack of understanding of the reason -- indeed the impelling necessity -- for intelligence operations against the Soviet enemy, such as the U-2 flight. Mr. Allen Dulles, in his Detroit speech* last week, irrefutably demonstrated why the U-2 program was so essential to our national safety.

As his speech implies, few people comprehend that the Cold War in many respects is more deadly than a hot war, and that the obtaining of dependable information on Soviet capabilities must continue to have the highest priority.

If our people were properly educated in the realities of the world crisis, the U-2 program would have received (as it deserved) the highest commendation -- and not the torrent of petty and uninformed criticism.

A recent news story by an American observer, returning from Moscow, is especially disconcerting. The Soviets have exhibited the wreckage of the U-2 for many weeks. Beside the exhibit, they have maintained a "comment book" in which tourists from all over the world are invited to record comments or observations.

This reporter examined this book, and found that "not

* Incidentally, a speech entitled to much greater coverage and emphasis than was accorded it by our press.

many Americans were bold enough to defend the American Government's policy." Most were content with "vague platitudes about peace and friendship," and some of the American comments were sickening. For example, there was an American who wrote that the U-2 flight was "a wonton act of aggression which is deplored by peace-loving Americans!"

The Powers trial has recently received world-wide attention. While the extent to which he was brain-washed may never be known, and certainly he was in a most difficult position, the fact remains that his testimony was no credit to the way in which we in America educate and indoctrinate our people. As a dispatch in the New York Times said, Powers "defended himself solely by pleading political naivete." He claimed to be "just a pilot," disinterested in world politics. He was critical of the Government which sent him, and he had little if anything to say on behalf of his own Country.

No one sitting safely and comfortably at home should criticize Powers without knowing more about the pressures which he must have endured. I certainly do not intend to criticize him. One may fairly ask, nevertheless, whether a Communist agent in similar circumstances would have reacted so weakly.

A more broadly based example of the political immaturity of American young men was afforded by the experience in Communist

prison camps during the Korean War. This is not an appropriate time to document this discreditable episode in our history. Suffice it to say that the record is a sorry one.

Of the thousands of Americans taken prisoner, there were remarkably few who made efforts to escape. But this was not the worst. The study made by the Department of Defense after the War disclosed that a shockingly high percentage of our prisoners collaborated, in varying degrees, with their Communist captors. The explanation was that these boys, otherwise fine Americans, did not understand the issues involved; they did not understand what America was fighting for; they did not have the slightest comprehension of what Communism really means; they were mentally and spiritually ignorant and unprepared for the techniques of pressure and persuasion employed against them. Indeed, most of them did not understand and appreciate the comparative merits of their own form of government enough to defend it.

The resolution which I support today proposes that a required course devoted specifically to the study in depth of International Communism be added to the curriculum of every secondary school. The resolution describes, quite generally, the nature of such course, and the necessity of training teachers and preparing text books suitable for its presentation.

The examples I have cited above strikingly demonstrate the need for intensive education on the nature, purpose and techniques of International Communism. Indeed, this must be self-evident to every member of this House.

Perhaps some of you are asking the question whether our schools are not already doing a reasonably adequate job in this respect. This is a question which I, as Chairman of the public schools system in Richmond, have investigated with some care. The schools generally have my respect and admiration, but relatively few of our public schools have specific courses on Communism. Usually, this subject is dealt with in conventional courses in social studies or in survey courses in history and government where there is a lack of depth, emphasis and concentration.

Also, many of the text books are inadequate. Some of these are still inclined to equate Communism with Fascism. There remains a feeling among some writers and teachers that our youth must be warned against the dangers from the "right" (i.e. some form of Fascism) as much as against the dangers from the "left" (i.e. Communism).

Nothing could be more misleading or superficial than thinking which equates Communism with Fascism. As repugnant

as Fascism should be to all Americans, it is now a spent force in the world. But even this misses the point. Fascism was never an international force with the ideological appeal and conspiratorial thrust of Communism.

I have presented the idea of specific, required courses in International Communism before other forums. There are still a few who are concerned lest the teaching of Communism fall into "wrong hands." These are individuals who think that if Communism is openly taught, some students will be subverted into Communist converts.

Even if it be assumed that this would occasionally happen in one of the thousands of schools in our country, this is a small price to pay for adequately educating the great mass of American young people on the one problem which transcends in importance all other problems which confront our age.

As all of you know who have had military experience, accurate and thorough information on the enemy (i.e. intelligence) is essential to the winning of a battle, a campaign or a war. We are engaged in a type of war which is more dangerous to the lives and liberties of our people than any or all of the other wars of our history. This is a contest which, if we are to win it, will not end next year, or the next decade. It may well

last for half a century. Unless we develop an informed citizenry who do understand the issues, there is, in my judgment, little hope of eventual victory,

It may be of interest to you that we in the Richmond Public Schools expect to inaugurate, next February, a course in International Communism along the lines recommended by this resolution. The Virginia State Board of Education is also moving significantly in this direction.

There is reason to believe that, at long last, school boards and educators are commencing slowly to realize that traditional methods in this area are inadequate. It would be a salutary thing for the American Bar Association to support and encourage this move actively and vigorously.

I hope that it will be your pleasure to approve the resolution.