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Resolution as to Teaching of International Communism

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October 18, 1960

Re: Resolution as to Teaching of
International Communism

To Members of the Board of Governors
of the American Bar Association:

The Committee on Communist Tactics, Strategy and Objectives, after considerable study made certain findings and recommendations with respect to the "vital importance that our youth should (understand) . . . the true nature, sinister meaning and ulterior purpose of Communism. . ." The House of Delegates, with the concurrence of the Board, approved the recommendation of this Committee with respect to the importance of providing "addresses and literature to school assemblies and civic organizations to explain the nature, objectives and tactics of Communism and its dangers to our rights and freedom . . ."

A further resolution recommended by the Committee with respect to the dissemination of copies of its report was referred to the Board of Governors.

A resolution, supplementing those of the Committee, was introduced by me on the need for formal instruction in the secondary schools on International Communism. This supplemental resolution was also referred to the Board of Governors for

consideration, and as I understand it, report back to the House at the February meeting.

The purpose of this memorandum is to summarize my reasons for sponsoring the supplemental resolution.

The Need For Increased Knowledge
And Understanding

There can be no question as to the need for increased public understanding of the nature of International Communism and the scope and character of its threat to western civilization. In commenting on a study released by Mr. Nixon, the New York Times (August 22, 1960) 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.'"

In the remarkable book by Dr. and Mrs. Overstreet, entitled "What We Must Know About Communism," the authors point out that they were impelled to write the book by the appalling lack of real understanding of the Communist challenge to America and the free world.

Dr. Conant's provocative study, "The Child, The Parent And The State," 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 carefree and complacent" attitude of the people.

The American Bar Association, through work of Committees, action in the past by the House of Delegates and in speeches by its leaders over the years, has frequently recognized the need for doing something effective about this lack of understanding of our country's peril. The recent report of the Committee on Communist Tactics, Strategy and Objectives is the latest example.

The Schools Are Not Presently Doing
Enough To Meet This Problem

The Communist Tactics Committee's report attracted my attention primarily because it touched upon the importance of education. As Chairman of the Public School System in Richmond, I have had occasion to investigate this subject with some care. I have personally reviewed some of the principal text books being used in the secondary schools; have discussed this with public school educators; and have spoken on the subject before the National Association of School Board Members.

May I say, quite clearly, that the public schools have my respect and admiration, and I do not criticize what they are doing so much as what they have not yet undertaken to do.

The hard fact is that relatively few of our secondary schools have specific courses on International 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 serious lack of depth, emphasis and concentration.

Such survey courses cannot, and do not pretend, to cover the subject of International Communism adequately. The unfortunate result -- indeed almost incredible result -- is that after fifteen years of the Cold War there is a serious educational lag in the one area which is most vital to the peace and freedom of the world.

The Testimony of Allen Dulles

Since I became interested in this problem, I have found that my concern is shared by a good many others. Allen Dulles, head of Central Intelligence Agency, has spoken twice on this subject in recent months, namely, before the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the Corporation Law Section of the ABA. In the latter speech, on August 29, Mr. Dulles said:

"I was shocked to find (by a study which he made) that while one may learn almost everything;

* We are initiating such a course on an experimental basis in the Richmond Public Schools in February, and expect to establish it next year as a part of our regular curriculum.

else, it is not easy to get a course which gives you the full background of the sweep of the Communist movement, beginning with its history and Karl Marx, and dealing particularly with the past forty years.

* * * * *

"And yet, while we can learn all about the Renaissance, and about the conquests from Caesar to Napoleon, we really don't get (in the colleges) the background that we and our children ought to be getting (on the Communist threat and methods) . . ."

Although Mr. Dulles was speaking primarily about the colleges and the universities, the need is even more significant in the secondary schools. It must be remembered that less than 25% of our youth carry their formal education beyond high school.

The Objections To Teaching Communism
Are Unsound

There are nevertheless still some who are fearful that the teaching of courses on Communism would fall into the "wrong hands." These are individuals who think that some students may be subverted, by ultra-liberal teachers, into Communist sympathizers or converts.

On the other hand, there are others who are concerned by the possibility that courses on Communism would sometimes become "witch hunts", with adverse consequences to freedom of expression.

Even if it be assumed that both of these undesired results would occasionally happen in a few of the thousands of schools in our country, it seems to me that 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 of our age.

We must face the facts of this world, and our schools must and can be trusted to teach them.

Again, quoting Mr. Dulles:

"Let the facts be told of the story of the Communist movement over the last forty years and its background. Let these facts speak for themselves."

Lawyers, of all people, should be willing -- not only to permit, but strongly to urge -- that the facts with respect to International Communism be taught in our schools.

As the proposed resolution states, these courses should meet the highest academic standards of accuracy, thoroughness and scholarship. While no one would suppose that this would always be the case, I have seen enough of our public school system and teachers to know that this would be the aim and objective of the overwhelming majority.

The ABA Should Seek To Be Effective

The House of Delegates approved the resolution which, in substance, recommended that lawyers appear before school assemblies and make speeches on this subject. However helpful this may be, we all know that the impact will be minimal.

If the problem is as serious as the report of the Communist Tactics Committee indicates, and every responsible person in our country agrees that it is serious, the ABA should recommend something more effective than sporadic speeches before student assemblies.

We should place the influence of the lawyers of America behind sound education - in the classroom, where it will be most effective.

The Revised Resolution

Attached to this memorandum is an amended form of resolution. In my judgment, this is an improvement over the one which I introduced rather hurriedly in Washington. It will, I believe, meet most of the thoughts expressed on the floor of the House.

Conclusion

It is hoped, for the reasons indicated above, that the Board will report this revised resolution favorably to the House of Delegates in February.

Respectfully submitted,

Lewis F. Powell, Jr.
Richmond, Virginia