



12-13-1960

Supplemental Statement to Virginia Commission on Public Education

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SUPPLEMENTAL STATEMENT
TO
VIRGINIA COMMISSION ON PUBLIC EDUCATION

Introductory Remarks

This is a supplement to the statement which I submitted to the Commission on July 15, 1959, shortly after the commencement of its work. At that time, the Commission was operating under serious limitations of time and budget, and I expressed concern as to whether in view of these limitations the Commission would be able to make the kind of study which seemed so imperative. I am happy to say that in the intervening months you have (i) overcome what seemed to be insurmountable handicaps, (ii) submitted one of the most significant reports ever made on public education in Virginia, (iii) witnessed the implementation of certain of your recommendations by the General Assembly, and (iv) so impressed the General Assembly that you were given an additional biennium in which to carry forward your notable work.

I commend the Commission on what you have already done to stimulate significant improvements in public education in Virginia, and also on the thoroughness with which you are carrying forward your work. There is every reason to believe that the people of Virginia, through the General Assembly and also through the State

Board of Education and local school boards, will receive your findings and recommendations with the greatest confidence.

Scope of Supplemental Statement

My remarks this morning will merely supplement my statement of July 15, 1959, which dealt primarily with the effectiveness of the curriculum of our secondary schools. I would like to focus attention on two points, namely (i) the need for more effective instruction on International Communism, and (ii) the need for increasing the time devoted to secondary education.

Instruction on the History, Objectives and Techniques of International Communism

Since my previous appearance before the Commission, I have had occasion to look into the nature and scope of instruction on International Communism. My conclusion is that there is a serious lack of depth, emphasis and concentration on the history, objectives and techniques of this new force in the world which is determined to destroy western civilization.

The truth is, none of our present courses is designed for this purpose. We have courses on American and Virginia history, and we have survey courses on world history. We also teach,

as we must, our own government, and we have what in effect are survey type courses which provide comparisons with other forms of government.

The world history courses necessarily deal broadly and briefly with the vast sweep of history, and there is relatively little on the history of Communism as a conspiratorial force. In the government courses, Communism is discussed along with Fascism and Socialism as a "form" or system of government. There is a notable lack of thoroughness and emphasis. There is sometimes the implication that Communism is merely another form of government comparable to certain other forms which have come and gone with history.*

It seems to me that the basic difficulty has been the failure to recognize that International Communism is a new and unique force in the world, which must be taught as such. It does not fit into the conventional curriculum pattern which we in education have more or less blindly followed for decades.

The President's Science Advisory Committee reported in 1959 that most physics text books have stood still "over the last half century or have simply been patched up by adding sections

* In speaking of "courses", I am talking about the prescribed text books. There are, of course, many teachers who supplement the text books with other material, and there are no doubt instances of some very fine instruction in this area.

on recent developments as postscripts." This observation may, to a degree, also be applicable to many of our history and government text books. Chapters and paragraphs have been added, but these tend to bring down to date the familiar types of courses which were studied by us and our fathers decades ago. But the contents of these books are not bad for the purposes for which they were apparently written. Their authors would probably be the first to agree that these survey course text books were not intended to deal in depth with Communism and all of the special problems which this menacing force has created. Those of us who plan the curricula have not recognized the need for and demanded the proper type of courses in this area.

Allen W. Dulles, head of Central Intelligence Agency, has spoken twice on this subject in recent months. In a speech on August 29, 1960, before the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Mr. Dulles said:

"We need far and wide in this country more education on the whole history of the Communist movement.

"In our schools and colleges we can find many courses in ancient history, in philosophy, courses on the great movements of the past, the conquests of ancient times from Alexander the Great to Napoleon. Courses on Communist theory and practices are few and far between.

"Yet, today we are face to face with a revolution which since 1917 has absorbed almost a billion people; a movement which boasts blatantly and openly that it will destroy us and all the institutions which we hold essential to our freedom and to our growth, spiritually and materially.

* * * * *

"By and large, however, in our educational institutions, except in the graduate field or in specialized schools and seminars, these subjects are not generally taught.

"I have reviewed the curriculums of many of our universities and colleges and, despite a considerable advance in recent years our students are not yet afforded a broad opportunity to gain the essential background knowledge of Communist history and policy. And we should start this education in our secondary schools.

* * * * *

"Such an educational program should not be approached in any spirit of propaganda or trying to make a case or sell a thesis. The history of the communism movement should be taught objectively, recognizing, as appropriate, scientific, technical, and other accomplishments of the peoples who have been absorbed by it.

"We should not be afraid to teach the subject. A history of communism and of all its works would bear its own indictment of the system.

"Let the facts speak for themselves.

"There is a real urgency to build up our knowledge on the entire background of the Communist thrust against our civilization."

I have quoted at some length from Mr. Dulles' speech because he is in a unique position to evaluate the need for a

better understanding of the basic cause of the critical problems which confront the free world.

This Commission has also demonstrated its awareness that America is "today engaged in a competition for survival imposed upon us" by International Communism.* You pointed out that a major part of your study "has been devoted to those areas of the curriculum made critical by the needs of a changing world."**

Recommendation as to Instruction
On Communism

It is hoped that the Commission in its final report will recommend affirmative measures to fill what seems to me to be the single most disquieting educational gap of our times. Specifically, I suggest consideration of the following recommendations:

(a) That there be added to the curriculum of secondary schools a course devoted specifically to the study in depth of the history, philosophy, objectives and techniques of International Communism;

(b) That such courses should meet high academic standards of accuracy, thoroughness and scholarship;

(c) That appropriate in-service training be provided to assure that qualified teachers are available to conduct such courses;

* Report of Commission on Education (January 1960), p. 9.

** Report of Commission on Education (January 1960), p. 36.

(d) That in the training and certification of new teachers, due recognition should be accorded the need for teachers highly qualified in this respect; and

(e) That the publishers of text books and materials for secondary schools should be encouraged to prepare expeditiously the requisite materials for the training of teachers and for the conducting of such courses in our schools.*

It hardly need be added that implementation of the foregoing recommendations must be coordinated with the teaching, with the utmost thoroughness, of our own history, government and economic system - with special emphasis on the devastating contrast between a Communist society and freedom under the Rule of Law.

We in Richmond are making a start during the term commencing in February 1961, with specific instruction on International Communism. A committee of teachers is now working on an outline which will be included, on a pilot plan basis, in courses on government. It is hoped that this experimentation will lead to permanent courses which deal more thoroughly with the subject.

There are indications that other school systems are also moving in this direction, as evidenced by a recent news item from the District of Columbia where such a course is being commenced in the sixth grade. The American Bar Association has also become interested in this problem and has arranged for a conference with leading educators for January 1961.

* See Appendix A for a partial bibliography on Communism.

It is to be hoped that Virginia, at the state level, will take the lead and set a worthy example for the nation.

The Need For More Time In School

Nothing quite upsets an educator as much as a proposal to add another course to already badly over-crowded curricula. I am entirely sympathetic with this reaction, and believe that something must be done to provide additional time in school.

One can argue with considerable force that the areas of learning have expanded more in the 60 years of this century than in all of the rest of recorded history added together. Within this incredibly short time - indeed, within the life time of a large percentage of living Americans - we have witnessed the automotive age, the air age and now we stand on the threshold of the space age; there have been the greatest wars in all history, with the worst destruction of life and property and the greatest upheaval of nations; fantastic advances in communication and transportation, as well as the revolutionary forces sweeping mankind, have made the world so small that events in the Congo or in Laos are of pressing concern to every American; there has been the rise of International Communism as a new force, without parallel in history, with the will and potential capability of

suppressing all freedom; and, through scientific breakthroughs undreamed of even twenty-five years ago, mankind has now developed the means with which to destroy himself and all that civilization has created down through the ages.

And yet, in spite of these vast new areas of learning which must be included in any educational program worthy of the name, we are still staggering along within the general framework of a system designed for an entirely different age and period.

As I have proposed the addition of a new course in an already over-crowded curriculum, I will address myself briefly to only one aspect of the overall need for fresh and imaginative solutions to the staggering problem of how to provide adequate educational opportunities in the 1960's.

The school year, prescribed by law, is a minimum of 180 days. Certainly, here in Richmond there has been little change in the length of the school year within my memory. Our children are going to school only about 50% of the days in the year - just as they did 30 to 40 years ago. The other half of the year is made up of holidays, with Saturdays, Sundays, special holidays, and the long summer holiday of almost three full months.

Similarly, the number of hours per day required in school during the high school grades has not changed materially in recent years - although this has varied somewhat from time to time and also among local school divisions.

There is general agreement that there is too little time to teach what is necessary. There is no agreement as to what to do to correct the situation. Suggestions that the hours, or the days within a year, or the years in school, be extended have all been made. But there seem to be dozens of reasons why every such suggestion is resisted by all of us.

I have made no detailed study to ascertain the best solution, and I am not prepared today to make any firm recommendation. I recognize that anyone bold enough to undertake this will bring down upon himself the wrathful displeasure of thousands of students and perhaps an equal number of parents, not to mention the many who have a vested interest in the present leisure time of our young people. But the fact that this is a difficult and complex problem is no reason to continue to avoid facing up to it. Other countries have done this, and have lengthened the school year as well as the week and the day.

There is some reason to believe that there is a greater demand for additional time in school than most educators suppose. Consider, for example, the increased popularity of our summer schools. In Richmond we had a total enrollment of some 3900 pupils in the 1960 summer school conducted in the old John Marshall Building. This is to be compared with 1134 who were similarly enrolled only ten years ago.

I am inclined to favor three steps initially, namely (i) lengthening the school year, perhaps by only two or three weeks; (ii) greatly increasing the emphasis on summer schools; and (iii) re-examining prescribed daily schedules, with the view at the high school level of some modest lengthening of the school day.

But it must be recognized that these suggestions are temporizing with the problem. We can hardly require additional years in school beyond the twelve now prescribed in Richmond. We cannot follow Russia and some other countries on a six day week, as Saturday has become almost as much of an American family holiday as Sunday. Lengthening the day has obvious problems of diminishing returns.

Summer school is meritorious, but it reaches only limited numbers and these are usually students interested in accelerating - rather than broadening the scope of - their work.

It thus appears that the basic answer to this pressing problem is to lengthen appreciably the school year. America can no longer afford, in this fiercely competitive world, the leisurely educational pace of 50 years ago.

Lewis F. Powell, Jr.

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