

Pathfinder

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A year has 12 months, Junior!

American Legion rows with school men over what progressive education does

Los Angeles parents were shocked. The survey showed:

Of 11,000 high school juniors, 18% didn't know how many months are in a year, 16% weren't sure why July 4th is a holiday, 3% couldn't tell time, 5% didn't know what one half of 70 is.

"Progressive" education got the blame. This, its opponents said, was what you could expect when "personality-developing" activities became more important than fundamentals.

But the fight against progressive education goes far beyond the alleged failure to teach enough reading, writing and arithmetic. For instance, the American Legion, self-appointed watchdog of American ideals, fears the progressive educators are teaching socialism. As a result the Legion, with almost 4 million members, joined the rebellion against progressive education. It got into a row with the National Educational Association, an organization with which it had co-operated for 31 years.

The fight broke out at the NEA convention in Detroit last week. The Legion touched it off with a blistering article in its journal, the *American Legion Magazine*. The article charged:

• • "One of the strongest forces today in propagandizing for a socialistic America is the hierarchy of the NEA."

• • "The progressive education program . . . has already . . . cheated a whole generation of our youth of many of the essentials in a proper training for life."

• • "[NEA] goon squads . . . have turned up to do a discrediting job on citizens whenever there has been an uprising against 'progressive' education."

progressive education

The Legion's chief target was NEA's National Commission for the Defense of Democracy. The commission struck back:

"A careful analysis of this article discloses numerous misstatements of fact and the usual shopworn clichés of those who have found it popular to destructively criticize the public schools."

Teachers' Side. About 3,800 convention delegates representing more than half the nation's 950,000 teachers issued a statement "deploring" the article. Another NEA statement said: "No action could better please the enemies of the American way of life. . . ."

The Legion's article adds support to criticism by some parents and other groups. Martin Essex, chairman of the NEA academic freedom committee, says: "Attacks on the public schools are greater than at any time in the last 100 years."

Critics of progressive education insist teachers don't place enough emphasis on achievement in their fear of harming the child's personality.

Added Subjects. Many parents also oppose the progressive education idea of "learning by doing." They say it does not teach a child to think.

For evidence, they point to spangled curricula which include hobby clubs, shop work, music appreciation, finger-painting, puppet shows, home arts, dancing and bowling, some of which are taught in "gym" and recreation periods.

The result? Bernard Iddings Bell, educational consultant, says "that the products of our schools for the most part are incompetent to think and act intelligently, honestly and bravely in this difficult era."

Defenders of the schools assert that many of the attacks are inspired by "racketeers." The Defense Commission says, "For some the business of attacking and smearing has been too lucrative a racket to be readily relinquished."

Others agree with Earl McGrath, U.S. Commissioner of Education:

"I do not suggest that pupils should learn the three Rs of citizenship *instead* of the three Rs of academic work.

"What I do say is that the schools should teach *both*: and it is my conviction that, by and large, they are doing a magnificent job under rather severe handicaps."