

Brownshirts in the Classroom

By Suzanne U. Clark

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The current trend of favoring political correctness over freedom of speech is one of the most alarming shifts in American intellectual life. *Human Events* reports that “70 percent of the nation's colleges and universities have adopted some form of censorship code”, citing an article in the November 1990 *Washington Times*. The typical code forbids criticism of homosexuals, lesbians, and other groups. The State University of New York at Buffalo, for example, warns against “racist, sexist, homophobic and anti-lesbian, ageist and ethnically derogatory statements”, as noted by constitutional authority Tom Jipping in *Human Events* (June 15, 1991), adding that Stanford University has a similar policy. For the Christian, whose God is no respecter of codes, such curtailments must be disavowed when they conflict with the moral law of the Bible.

While thought control on college campuses has been well-publicized, it is not widely known that the largest union in America, the National Education Association, is also waging an intense and well-financed war on free speech. Prejudicing teachers against parents favoring traditional values and spying on critics seem to be primary activities (that, along with telling legislators and policy makers to vote NEA's way: nearly \$8 million of the 1989-90 budget was to be spent for lobbying and political purposes to urge support of such radical measures as tax-funded abortion, the ERA, “awareness” training workshops for “gay/lesbian issues in schools”, global education, socialized medicine, strict handgun control, sex education, school-based clinics, and counseling for students “struggling with their sexual/gender orientation”).

The giant teachers union earmarked nearly \$5 million of its \$147 million budget in 1990 “to devise appropriate strategies” for counterattacks against “the radical right-wing”. More specifically, some \$640,000 of that budget was designated to “maintain a clearinghouse of information regarding groups, individuals and activities/actions whose purpose is to attack and undermine public education”. This represents an enormous sum available to school officials to fight parents concerned about their children's schools. Parents have no such resources available to them, a point made by Eagle Forum President Phyllis Schlafly on her program *Radio Live* (6-16-90).

Before presenting a recent sampling of typical NEA “counterattacks” and strategies

against its conservative Christian enemies, it is worth noting that the crusade against critics was initiated at least ten years ago, with extensive files at NEA headquarters maintained on Christian Right organizations and with the widespread use of a training manual, *Combating the New Right*, designed to politicize teachers. The inflammatory tone of the manual is indicative of the NEA's hard-line approach:

Throughout the nation's history, right-wing extremists—racist, anti-civil rights, anti-labor, and anti-democratic—have played a recurrent role.... What is emerging today is a powerful convergence of forces on the right—militant cold warriors, anti-education would-be censors, anti-union, anti-regulatory free enterprise boosters, so-called pro-life, pro-family, and pro-flag superpatriots, and fundamentalist preacher politicians led by such electronic evangelists as Jerry Falwell of Moral Majority, James Robison, and Timothy LaHaye.

But propaganda, it became apparent, was merely a peripheral measure; the centerpiece of the whole operation was yet to be revealed. It took a letter to the editor written by a Christian woman in East Tennessee, namely, myself, to set off the bomb. Published as a guest column in my local newspaper in Bristol, Tennessee, the letter criticizing the NEA landed me a libel suit for \$100,000. I learned from deposition testimony that I was to have been the first of many casualties in the NEA's war on the New Right. Presumably, the threat of libel was to have been the weapon used to intimidate critics into silence. The question, Why a suit against Suzanne Clark?, was answered by the NEA's general counsel, Robert Chanin, in a manner with chilling implications relative to the First Amendment: “To draw a line beyond which our detractors may not go.”

How was I to know that cold January Sunday in 1982 when I wrote my letter to the *Bristol Herald-Courier* that somewhere inside an immense brick office building in Washington, D.C., was a secret monitoring station where officials of the powerful teachers union were watching and waiting to pounce on some unsuspecting dissenter? How was I to know my editorial was just the thing executive director Terry Herndon had been looking for, an opportunity, as he called it in a board meeting, “to sue somebody over all this right-wing slander.”

After nearly two years of litigation and bad publicity, the NEA dismissed the suit, which is the subject of my book *Blackboard Blackmail*. And while the libel suit, chosen as NEA's pièce de résistance to subdue its opponents, may have proven to be an embarrassment (Terry Herndon admitted that from the press he was “getting it on both sides of the head”), the two-million member organization has simply stepped up its attacks on other fronts.

Ten years later I have discovered the NEA continues to indoctrinate teachers on the evils of parental and Christian involvement in public schools. “Free to Learn, Free to Think” was the title of a conference sponsored by the Washington Education Association in 1989. The conference featured Janet L. Jones, author of *What's Left After the Right*, a

200-page manual of strategies funded by the NEA. The publication was designed to “Supplement staff inservice with basic background information about the Far Right Movement” and “Stimulate more in depth investigations of the Righteous Right”. Major issues representing “the philosophical foundation of ultra-conservatism” included “home schooling, ‘traditional’ family rights, Christian constitutional priority, creationism, peace through strength, phonics only, American patriotism-heritage, curricular ‘basics’ only, right to life [and] school prayer”.

The report mentioned a number of “ultra-conservative” organizations presumed to be enemies of public education: textbook critics Mel and Norma Gabler, the Heritage Foundation, Pro-Family Forum, Concerned Women for America, Eagle Forum, the American Freedom Coalition, and the National Association of Christian Educators/Citizens for Excellence in Education. Friends of public education were identified, as well: the American Library Association, the American Civil Liberties Union, the National School Boards Association, the National Education Association, People for the American Way, and others.

“Countering Far Right Tactics” is another paper published by the NEA which offers “an excellent list of suggestions that are helpful in the event you are directly involved in a confrontation.” This appeared as part of a handout given in August 1990 to principals in Washoe County, Nevada in connection with parental protests against the controversial reading series, *Impressions*. Assistance from People for the American Way, an organization that often teams up with the NEA to combat parents, was sought by Washoe County school officials. (Interestingly, one of PAW's board members was NEA president Mary Futrell who served both groups concurrently.)

NEA resolutions, passed annually at conventions, also show marked intolerance for Christianity and traditional values. Official denunciations of “extremist groups”, “sectarian practices”, “homophobia”, and “the teaching of religious doctrines and/or groups that promote anti-public-education agendas” are included among an assortment of policy statements that have more to do with promoting a humanistic world order than with the education of children. At the 1990 NEA convocation in Kansas City, the brown shirts were on hand to censor a pro-life caucus within the NEA by restricting literature and requiring a name change from “Pro-Life” to “Respect Life”. According to a teacher attending the convention who was interviewed by Concerned Women for America, “During one plenary session, two teachers tried to raise the issue of the sanctity of human life, but were booed and hissed at.... The harassment those two people received was unbelievable. I saw teachers who were so angry that they jumped out of their seats, screaming and throwing their fists, and turning red in the face.”

The Gay and Lesbian Caucus suffered no such opposition. Its members sported hot pink ribbons advertising their homosexuality and witnessed successful passage of a number of resolutions favorable to their cause.

In considering the NEA's militancy, its enormous political clout, its huge membership and

wealth, its ungodly agenda, one may, apart from belief in the might and justice of God, be tempted to despair. To think that 247 congressional candidates endorsed by the NEA won elections in November 1990; that two million teacher-members pay dues amounting to \$137 million a year; that the NEA requires teachers in 20 states to join or support it; that the NEA supports the killing of babies by abortion, homosexuality, control of all non-public schools, federal day care, drafting women, and radical feminism; and that the NEA is working through a national teacher certification board to fulfill its “113-year-old dream”, as described by a former union president, “of controlling who enters, who stays, and who leaves the profession”. To think the NEA teaches the children of America.

If teachers were to stop paying dues and parents were to stop sending their children off to be indoctrinated, the NEA empire, controlled from the top by a small power elite, might come toppling down. Invincibility, as both the Bible and history—especially recent history—teaches us, is a myth.

When teachers ask about insurance, the reason most tell me they join the NEA, I suggest they check their homeowner's policy and add a clause for classroom coverage, then cancel their union membership. As for belonging to a professional educational association, I refer them to Concerned Educators Against Forced Unionism which offers a list of alternative organizations. In light of God's unequivocal command to parents to train their children in truth and holiness (Chris Klicka, an attorney with the Home School Legal Defense Association, offers irrefutable Scriptural proof of the imperative of Christian education in his excellent paper “Urgent Need To Restore A Biblical View of Education”), parents should educate their children in private schools or at home. (It is disturbing to contemplate that even these alternatives appear to be threatened under President Bush's education reform plan, America 2000, which redefines public schools to include private ones and promises expanded federal control of education. Citizens for Excellence in Education has produced an enlightening analysis of the Bush proposal that is available for a minimal donation. Readers are urged to write for copies of the booklet *A Critique of America 2000* to give out to school board members, pastors, legislators and parents). It is my belief that anything less than obedience to the Lord of life will bring ruin and enslavement. The NEA, for all its arrogance and might, is but God's instrument of judgment on His wayward people.

The following are invaluable resources for Christians involved in education-related issues:

Concerned Educators Against Forced Unionism
8001 Braddock Rd.
Springfield, VA 22160

Citizens for Excellence in Education
PO Box 3200

Costa Mesa, CA 92628

Home School Legal Defense Association
Paeonian Springs, VA 22129

Note: Much of the information in this article was taken from Eagle Forum's *The Education Reporter*, *The Concerned Women for American Newsletter*, Concerned Educators Against Forced Unionism and *Educational Restructuring of America: Education or Indoctrination* by Carol Belt.