

The Book-Burnings Begin

The story of Professor Rugg and his textbooks. "Subversive," said Merwin K. Hart, apologist for fascism. Who started the campaign and why.

UP IN Concord, N. H., recently a lady named Grace P. Amsden wrote a hot letter to the local *Monitor-Patriot*, bewailing the rapid spread of Fifth Columns. Getting down to cases, she cited Professors George Counts and Harold Rugg as the authors of much treasonable business. (Ironically, not even Counts' recent Red-baiting has brought him absolution.) For years, she said, the American Legion and notably the DAR have been carrying on crusades against the use of their textbooks in the schools. After building her case for banning the books in Concord she wound up triumphantly with "We have no less an authority than President Roosevelt as to the damage already done throughout the nation's schools." And she forthwith quoted approvingly that Rooseveltian steal from *Mein Kampf*: "Gentlemen, I am going to choke Americanism down the throats of American youngsters, whether they like it or not." (Quote from Ray Tucker's Washington letter in the "National Whirligig" column, *Brooklyn Eagle*, September 11.)

So there you have it. From the President and Big Business down through the American Legion and the DAR to Miss Grace Amsden of Concord, N. H. It is an assault upon freedom and democracy in public education that has forced itself into every corner of the land. And the case of Harold Rugg's textbooks is one test case of freedom's survival. "SUBVERSIVE"?

What horrors do the Rugg books contain? Are they printed in red ink or stamped with a hammer and sickle? There is no resemblance between any of Rugg's textbooks and those published in the Soviet Union. Nor have any of Rugg's paragraphs been borrowed from a Communist pamphlet. What outrages the Chamber of Commerce are a few simple facts about American history and the way American business works. It was in the early twenties that Professor Rugg first tried his hand at making schoolbooks more readable for the school children he had observed droning through them year after year. With the help of Rockefeller money he wrote books for elementary and junior high school pupils that jumped the walls between history, geography, and civics and brought them together.

His series of texts that soon became so popular was known as *Man and His Changing Society*. Even that adjective "changing" seems to be a red flag before the bull's eye of an advertising impresario. Among the titles in the series are *Our Country and Our People*, *Changing Civilizations in the Modern World*, and *A History of American Government and Culture*. In choosing photographs to illustrate his books, Rugg thought a shot

of a migratory worker or a sharecropper was all right, too. Aren't they part of "Our Country and Our People"? But his accusers rule them out of the American scene. They just don't exist.

Five years ago the Federation of Citizens Associations of Washington, D. C., accused Rugg and two others of advocating Communism in their textbooks. The Board of Education said no. A lone straw in the wind, it attracted little attention. But two years ago a retired army major, Augustin G. Rudd, of Garden City, L. I., put his tin hat back on and charged into Rugg. He got the school system to mark the books "un-American" and throw them out. Having won his point, the major got a good press. Educators worried.

A year passed. Then up popped Merwin K. Hart in Binghamton, N. Y. to address the local Exchange Club on "Subversive Activities in the Schools." He wanted the Rugg books "purged" he said, and the local press goose-stepped behind him. Superintendent of Schools Daniel J. Kelly, other school officials, and the Binghamton Council of Parents and Teachers defended Rugg, but the Board of Education beat them down and the purge went through on April 17. Two board members proposed a public book-burning.

OTHER TOWNS FOLLOW

Fired by the Binghamton case and the growing hysteria over "national defense," business bigwigs in town after town stopped reading the financial columns long enough to take a look into the school library. And where they found a Rugg textbook they bore it triumphantly to the local paper and demanded editorials against it. Pressure from the paper, the Legion, the Chamber of Commerce soon resulted in the removal of Rugg's books from a large number of schools. Among those reported following Binghamton's example are Mountain Lakes and Wayne Township, N. J., Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Hornell, Olean and Rome, N. Y., and Manhasset, L. I.

Banning Rugg's books has not been enough for some enthusiasts. In March, a member of the Virginia State Legislature called for the burning of all books at the University of Virginia dealing with "Communism, Nazism, or any other isms." A few weeks later the vice-president of the School Board of Bradner, Ohio, grabbed some books which he considered tainted with subversive doctrines, from the high school library, and built a bonfire of them. The *Cleveland Plain Dealer* reported that "when Rev. William Wiegman, who is president of the board, ridiculed the Communist scare, a fiery cross was burned on his doorstep."

The press notes other towns where fascist-minded business men are plowing under free

education. In San Diego, Calif., the school superintendent told the Chamber of Commerce Educational Committee that no more of Rugg's books would be purchased and suitable replacements would be found. A day later Sweetwater and Coronado of the same state saw the books on the way out, with American Legion representatives testifying against them. On the 15th of this month the school superintendent of Chattanooga, Tenn., said that if any of the books listed in an American Legion Monthly article as "red" were to be found in the schools, he personally favored letting them go.

FRANCO SUPPORTER TALKS

Who are the individuals and organizations behind this textbook purge? And why are they doing it? Merwin K. Hart is head of the New York State Economic Council, a non-governmental outfit that grinds the ax of economy day in and day out for its wealthy taxpaying sponsors. No progressive legislative measure ever comes before New York without some heavy lobbying against it by Hart. He was also one of Franco's most loyal American supporters. Hart tipped his hand in the textbook drive in a letter recently printed in the *Adirondack Daily Enterprise*: "On page 231 [of Harold Rugg's *The Great Technology*] Rugg says that this program will include the doubling, even the quadrupling, of the national educational budget, raising the question whether the enormous rise in school budgets in recent years is not a phenomenon for which the theories of Professor Rugg and other advocates of so-called progressive education are not partly responsible."

There you have the case for economy confessed, and in another statement Hart reveals the more fundamental objection: "The Rugg books tend clearly to undermine the faith of the pupils in private enterprise—in the American system out of which American public education (the costliest in the world) is maintained." Even in this moment of fundamentals he could not stay a tear for taxation.

Advertisers and publishers, linked by the bonds of interchanging business, have also kicked the Rugg football around. The Advertising Federation of America, through Alfred T. Falk, director of its Research and Education Bureau, has swamped advertising and business men with pamphlets putting them on their guard against the Rugg menace. Falk points to the handwriting on the wall, if the younger generation should have its trust in advertising undermined by textbooks which are pretty frank about such questions as who pays the cost of advertising.

That mouthpiece of the National Association of Manufacturers, George Sokolsky, did