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Dr. Nicholas M. Butler in This--and Other--World Crises

By Oakley Johnson

Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler has drafted Columbia University for the war against Hitlerism, as he announced in the address to the faculty, October 3, "Columbia University in This World Crisis." Any instructor who doesn't like it had better resign forthwith, he said, and students who don't like it have nothing to say about these matters. For there is going on now, he says, "the war between beasts and human beings."

It is too bad Dr. Butler did not have enough foresight in March, 1935, to refrain from sending an official university representative to Hitler's Germany at the time of the Heidelberg University anniversary celebration—especially since Oxford University and other leading institutions boycotted the Nazi invitation. It is especially too bad that in June of that year Dr. Butler should have excluded from Columbia an anti-Nazi student, Robert Burke, American Student Union leader, because he took part in a demonstration against the appointment of a Columbia representative to the Nazi festivals. At this particular juncture, people would have more faith in Dr. Butler's eagerness to defend democracy against fascism if he had in the past been a little less eager to do the opposite.

Dr. Butler defines academic freedom as something inferior to a transcendental and mystic "uni-

versity freedom," which is the university's institutional right to be "unhampered" by any conduct on the part of the staff which would "damage its reputation," "lessen its influence," "lower its authority." In other words, Dr. Butler says, "I am the State." In other words, Dr. Butler places himself alongside Louis XIV and Adolph Hitler. In other words, there isn't any academic freedom in the first place.

Dr. Butler should not object if we who are not subject to his "university freedom" look a little at his career and note where he has stood in the past in critical situations. He has a long record, and the hundred and eighty-nine—more or less—titles in the Public Library form an open record.

FIRED SPINGARN

Dr. Butler is 78 years old, and has been president of Columbia for 38 years. He has several learned titles, including J. U. D., D. Litt., and LL. D., belongs to a dozen or more learned societies, including the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and is a member of the New York Chamber of Commerce and of a long list of exclusive clubs. In all these years he has had many opportunities to take sides in scores of controversies and campaigns, and has never missed a chance to line up on the side of reaction.

In 1911 Dr. Butler dropped from the faculty Professor J. E. Spingarn, who had been teaching lit-



DR. NICHOLAS MURRAY BUTLER

erature there for 11 years, because Spingarn refused to compromise on teaching methods. In 1917 Dr. Butler fired Professor J. McKeen Cattell because the latter wrote a letter to a Congressman opposing the sending of our youth to foreign battlefields, and fired Professor H. W. L. Dana because he was active in the People's Council for Peace. He expelled four students that year for anti-war activities, including Owen Cattell, Professor Cattell's son. He accepted the resignation of Professor C. A. Beard who pro-

tested against the dismissal of Cattell and Dana. In 1933 he dropped Donald Henderson from the Economics Department because Henderson organized and led anti-fascist students. This is a sample of "university freedom" in practice.

On April 9, 1912, Dr. Butler delivered one of his most ambitious political speeches at the Republican State Convention at Rochester, New York. This was when Theodore Roosevelt and his Bull Moose following were questioning the authority of the courts, and even their mild progressiveness was too much for Dr. Butler.

NAMES THE 'ENEMY'

"What about the multiplication table?" he shouted. "What about the Rule of Three? What about the law of gravitation?" After a considerable period of this eloquence he got down to brass tacks and revealed "The Supreme Issue" of the election: "Make no mistake, my fellow-Republicans: the inspiration and driving force behind the movement for the overthrow of representative institutions and for the attacks upon the integrity and independence of the courts, is Socialism. There is the enemy."

On Sept. 6, 1931, at the Parrish Art Museum in Long Island, Dr. Butler delivered himself of a talk on unemployment, but without particularly fruitful results. It

was unemployment insurance that agitated America's propertyless millions then, and the learned doctor just couldn't take it. "We are here dealing with a form of uncertainty which perplexes the wisest and the best meaning of men," he intoned. "The reason appears to be that the insecurity of employment is a form of uncertainty with which it has thus far proved impossible for insurance on a scientific basis to deal."

But there was no "uncertainty" in Dr. Butler's attitude toward the Child Labor Amendment. In 1933 he wrote a letter to the "Times" opposing the adoption of that amendment. When in 1935 the New York state senate refused to ratify the amendment, Dr. Butler wrote a letter to the members congratulating them for, as he said, "blocking any step toward ratification."

On September 3, 1934, a "Times" headline said: "Dr. Butler Scores Radicals on Wide Poverty—Charge of Non-Distribution of Wealth Held Sheer Invention."

It is true, as those who know his speeches can testify, that Dr. Butler is a master of straddling, abstraction, and platitude, qualities which often obscure a man's real stand, nevertheless, especially in a crisis, his influence, like a flatfoot's heel, has always been planted squarely on the side of Big Business and against the people.