

Community Influences and Pressure Groups

1900s

1. *Organizations of Financial, Industrial, and Commercial Corporations.* Of this group the National Association of Manufacturers and the National Dairy Council are typical of the most aggressive and perhaps the most effective in influencing the content of courses of study on points in which they are interested. This group also includes the national and state chambers of commerce. Some years ago an association of light and power companies was revealed to have developed a nationwide organization which spent very great sums of money to influence teachers in the schools. [More recently the American Medical Association has been very aggressive.²]

2. *Labor Organizations.* While labor organizations have constituted blocs exerting very powerful pressure on Congress and state legislatures, they have not yet become very active in attempting to influence the curriculums. Their principal efforts have been directed at getting compulsory attendance laws passed and enforced, in favoring free textbooks, and in getting labor problems considered in high school classes. Their attempts to influence the curriculum are still in the beginning stage.

3. *Patriotic Societies.* This group constitutes one of the most active and influential forces upon education. It includes such organizations as the American Legion, the strongest and most influential, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Daughters of the American Revolution, and the Daughters of the Confederacy.

Usually controlled by very conservative officials, they have frequently attempted to prevent the teaching of many materials thought by teachers to be in the interest of democracy and the common welfare, labeling the teaching of such things communistic, socialistic, or "foreign" doctrines.³ Not only are national and state organizations of these groups active in influencing the schools, but local chapters, which exist in almost every community, are also usually quite active and in many instances have influenced, directly or indirectly, the course of school policy.

4. *Commercial Corporations.* One of the most highly developed influences is that of thousands of corporations with goods or services to sell. Millions of dollars are spent annually upon books, pamphlets, charts, films, and other teaching materials thought to be useful for legitimate purposes of education. They are, however, also calculated to influence the thinking of future customers while they are young so that they may consider favorably the particular industry, product, or service in which the donors of the "educational" material are interested. In recent years the volume and the doubtful reliability of such material have become so great as to call for critical evaluation before it is used in the schools.

Also pursuing activities of this nature are local groups of business and professional men and individual business concerns. Among these are banks, factories, retail merchants, dairies, and city and county bar and medical associations, which directly and indirectly influence the schools, particularly in getting recognition of matters of particular interest to them and in discouraging attention to matters not approved by them.

Unofficial Influence Upon Textbooks.—Various organizations influence what is taught by controlling the adoption of textbooks. There are hundreds of known cases where administrators and candidates for administrative positions have received the support or the opposition of representatives of publishing companies. Much more important with respect to undue influence upon the contents of textbooks are the activities of various patriotic, commercial, religious, and other organizations to prevent adoption or continued use of textbooks containing materials which they would not like to have people read. . . .

Pressure is also exerted upon publishing companies to eliminate or revise materials in textbooks unfavorable to the interests of specialized economic and political groups, in some instances resulting in requests to authors to substitute materials less objectionable to the groups active in the area. This influence, however, has not been great, as publishers have also been sensitive to the necessity of meeting the needs and desires of authors, teachers, and the public. Nevertheless there is documentary proof⁵ that at least some authors of textbooks in the social studies were required to revise their manuscripts to meet the objections of public utility corporations.

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