

The Blumenfeld Education Letter

"My People Are Destroyed For Lack Of Knowledge" HOSEA 4:6

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The purpose of this newsletter is to provide knowledge for parents and educators who want to save the children of America from the destructive forces that endanger them. Our children in the public schools are at grave risk in 4 ways: academically, spiritually, morally, and physically — and only a well-informed public will be able to reduce these risks.
"Without vision, the people perish."

NEA Endorses Clinton And Bashes Whittle Private School Plan

Delegates at the National Education Association's 130th annual convention, held in Washington on July 5-8, voted overwhelmingly to endorse Gov. Bill Clinton of Arkansas for the presidency. The 8,500 delegates voted 6,321 in favor of Clinton and 842 against, making it the largest plurality (88%) ever given a presidential candidate by the NEA. Clinton told the convention that he supports pre-school programs and school restructuring.

But he received the loudest cheers when he said he would not back any use of public money to support private schools. The Bush administration favors allowing parents to receive vouchers that could be used against the cost of tuition at public or private schools, an idea the teachers fiercely oppose.

"I don't mind good, healthy competition," Clinton said. "If private schools want to get up and get going, let them have at it. I just don't think that with the situation we're in now, we can afford to divert public funds to private schools when we're already uncompetitive," he said to cheers. According to the *N.Y. Times* (7/8/92), "They cheered nearly every remark Mr. Clinton made in a setting that was much like the atmosphere of

a national political convention."

During a question-and-answer session, Clinton said he would consider appointing a teacher as education secretary. "I don't want to promise it since I'd never thought about it before about two minutes ago when you asked the question," he said. "I certainly wouldn't rule it out. I want to appoint someone who understands what is going on in the classrooms of America today."

His answer prompted the delegates to shout "Ma-ry, Ma-ry," suggesting that he choose past NEA president Mary Hatwood Futrell for the job.

Clinton added that he believes in the nation's education goals drawn up in Charlottesville, Virginia, in the fall of 1989 when he was head of the National Governors Association because he helped write them and "believes the president has an obligation to help meet them."

After the NEA convention Clinton made an unscheduled stop at the Capitol Hilton Hotel to thank the NEA Political Action Council for its endorsement and to invite NEA president Keith Geiger to stay in the Lincoln Room at the Clinton White House next year.

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Teacher Power

The largest single bloc of votes at the Democratic National Convention was not the New York or California delegations, but the teachers' unions. The NEA had nearly 400 delegates at the convention and, combined with the American Federation of Teachers, the teachers' unions had nearly 500 delegates. That was more power than was represented by any other group at the convention.

At the Democratic National Convention, Keith Geiger told the delegates, "I pledge that the 2.1 million members of the National Education Association will work in every neighborhood, in every village and town and city in every state in this union to elect the next president of the United States."

NEA Blasts Channel One

Free enterprise in education came under assault at the NEA convention as delegates voted to send "strongly worded" letters to about 20 companies that advertise on Channel One, Chris Whittle's 12-minute news show that is piped into about 11,800 schools nationwide and viewed by 7.1 million students every morning.

Schools that sign up for Channel One receive expensive high-tech video equipment (satellite dishes, cable wiring, videotape units, television sets) in exchange for requiring students to watch its news programs and 30-second commercials for such things as toothpaste, movies and candy bars.

"We don't do this very often," Bill Martin, NEA director of communications, said of the delegates' action. "The NEA does not get into the practice of sending organizations messages until we are very serious about things. We have the ability to take the clout of 2.1 million members and translate it into correspondence that gets our point

across."

Among the advertisers targeted for the messages are Warner-Lambert, Colgate Palmolive, Quaker Oats, Gillette, Columbia Pictures, Warner Brothers, Paramount Pictures, Twentieth Century Fox, Proctor & Gamble, Pepsi-Cola, M&M-Mars, Frito-Lay, Nike, Burger King, Nintendo, Kellogg, Sprint and Taco Bell.

Nick Leon, president of the East Side Teachers Association in San Jose, California, offered the proposal, declaring, "Our students are not for sale."

"The commercialization of the classroom and the conversion of public schools into private for-profit ones will continue as long as Chris Whittle's Channel One and other such media businesses have access to our students," Mr. Leon said. "We are professional educators, credentialed and responsible to educate students. We did not go to college to be sales reps for candy, hamburger, tennis shoes or cosmetic conglomerates."

Honig Versus Whittle

The high school (Overholt) in San Jose where Mr. Leon teaches social studies is being sued by California Schools Superintendent Bill Honig and the California Congress of Parents, Teachers and Students because of its use of Channel One. The lawsuit alleges that students are forced to watch the channel and teachers have been threatened with disciplinary action if they shut it off. No mention is made of students being forced to attend school in the first place and forced to attend values clarification, death education, sex education and other affective programs.

In Trenton, New Jersey, administrative law judge Bruce R. Campbell ruled recently that putting school children in front of a television set to watch Channel One's mix of news and commercials violates New Jersey

law and should be banned. However, teachers are free to force their students to watch videos on sex and condom education supplied by Planned Parenthood. We know of one youngster in Michigan who committed suicide after watching a film about suicide in his classroom. So far, we know of no student committing suicide after watching Channel One!

NEA state leaders and rank-and-file members also vented their feelings about Chris Whittle and the impact his Edison Project could have on public education. "If they succeed in making them publicly funded private schools," said Charles Bowyer, president-elect of the New Mexico Education Association, "we'll be left with only the children of the poor who can't afford Chris Whittle's elitist ideas."

"I think . . . they would steal some students from the public system," said Ann P. Anctil, a French teacher and president of the Maine affiliate. The NEA would have to counter with a campaign to "educate" the public about the kind of schools Mr. Whittle is running, emphasizing that they were getting paid advertising from sponsors, she said.

The Whittle plan would "hurt public schools" in the Los Angeles area said Walt Noisette, a science teacher at Royal High School in Simi Valley, California. He said Whittle would favor affluent communities over poor ones.

"My fear of a national chain of schools is it would be like a McDonald's," said Lucy Hope, a pre-school and special education teacher at Taiaina Elementary School in Wasilla, Alaska.

Obviously, the recent recruitment by Whittle of Benno Schmidt Jr., former president of Yale University, to head Whittle's controversial Edison Project has sent waves of anxiety throughout the NEA establishment. Whittle's idea of creating 1,000 for-profit private schools is downright revolu-

tionary in a country where government monopoly education has dominated the scene for over 100 years. While there have always been a few small, proprietary, for-profit private schools, most private schools are non-profit. So the idea is even revolutionary for the private sector.

But what is even more significant is that an innovative entrepreneur and a top Ivy League president have joined forces to do something about education in America based on free-market principles. In one fell swoop, Whittle's project has become the cutting edge of educational change. And it will succeed not only because public education will get worse, but because the Edison Project is in synch with the trend toward decentralization and privatization brought about by the revolution in technology.

Schlaflly Blasts NEA

Phyllis Schlaflly, in her *Washington Times* column of July 19, raked the NEA's liberal social agenda over the coals. She wrote:

The NEA resolutions endorse "mandatory kindergarten and compulsory attendance," as well as "early childhood programs in the public schools for children from birth through age 8." The NEA wants all sorts of regulations on home schoolers.

The NEA demands a larger role for the public schools in determining the curriculum of sex education and asserts the right of "every individual" to "live in an environment of freely available information" about sex, with "confidential access" to "health, social and psychological services." This means that the NEA is asserting the right of the schools to teach anything they want to children without parental knowledge or consent.

On the other "choice" issue, several resolutions reaffirmed the NEA's position proclaiming total support for abortion. In addition, New Business Item 22 orders the NEA to "take a proactive stance" in favor of abortion and to "provide assistance to the state affiliates to defeat pro-life legislation."

New Business Item 29 orders the NEA to establish a \$50,000 annual fund to make grants to state affiliates working for abortion rights and decrees that this NEA expenditure "shall continue until the Free-

dom of Choice Act is passed in Congress."

NEA-AFT Merger?

The delegates also discussed the possibility of a merger between the 2.1 million-member NEA with the 750,000-member American Federation of Teachers (AFT), which belongs to the AFL-CIO, a 14.2 million-member federation of about 90 unions. But Albert Shanker, president of the AFT, said that although a merger on the national level is by no means imminent, rivals at the local level may join together in some states.

Shanker said that the unions need to fight for fundamental changes in the classroom, including developing a national curriculum and tests to monitor student achievement.

"We need to return to the idea of the common school: the idea that children of all races, religions, classes and national backgrounds should get a common education and a set of values so that they can learn to live together in a diverse, democratic society," he said.

Contrary to Shanker's call for national testing, the NEA delegates voted overwhelmingly against mandated statewide or national standardized testing that could be used to compare one school or district to another. Instead, NEA officials said that other forms of testing academic achievements of pupils should be used, such as requiring pupils to collect schoolwork in various subjects in portfolios that are periodically reviewed to determine progress.

This stance is very much in agreement with that of deconstructionist, anti-phonics whole-language educators who claim that standardized testing will penalize whole-language students who are taught that literal accuracy in reading is not important.

NEA Versus Alexander

Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander, who had avoided criticizing the NEA before its convention, finally spoke out against the NEA's crass political ambitions. "In order to get the nomination, [Clinton's] had to make the NEA happy, and the NEA only likes people they can control," he said. NEA president Keith Geiger had just given President Bush an "F" on his performance as "education president." He said of the President, "He reminds me of the high school student who said to his teacher, 'I don't think I deserve an F.' And the teacher says, 'I don't think you do, either, but it's the lowest mark I can give you.'"

Alexander was not amused. "I've lived long enough to know that when the NEA gives you a good grade that means you don't stray very far from their agenda," the Secretary told reporters. "You won't see any of their candidates coming out for giving all children choices of all schools — public, private or religious — because the NEA doesn't want that. That's more change than they can stomach. They'll talk a good game, but when it gets down to it they won't act on it. . . . It's an issue of control . . . they're fighting over control," he said. "They've got it now and they don't want to lose it to the parents or to the communities or to the publicly elected leaders. . . . The NEA will give its support to the candidate who promises the most new dollars for the least amount of change. For the country to change, the schools have to change and the country is not going to change with the NEA draped around its neck."

Don Cameron, executive director of the NEA, said that Alexander's comments were part of "a calculated decision by the presidential campaign to attack the NEA in order to have an enemy. They have not been able to improve education, and rather than ac-

cepting responsibility, they are looking out for someone to blame."

NEA president Keith Geiger accused Alexander of sounding like "the CEO of Whittle Communications." "Mr. Secretary," Geiger chided, "may I suggest you simply submit your resume to one of your pals at Whittle. And then you can assume the position for which you are so clearly qualified: secretary of private, for-profit education."

It is obvious that a full-scale war is brewing between the forces of government monopoly education as represented by the nation's largest and most militant union and the forces of free enterprise.

The Collectivist Millstone

The late Warren Brookes once referred to public education as socialism's last refuge, "a kind of collectivist millstone around the neck of our nation." He wrote in 1990:

[T]oday we can say with some confidence that the decade of the 1980s will be remembered as the period when Marxism finally admitted it was wearing no clothes, and market capitalism swept the global economy with the sheer momentum of its high technological development and telecommunications revolution.

Sadly, though, the 1990s could well be the decade when the global information revolution left the U.S. market economy in the dust, falling behind the Pacific Rim nations and Europe.

And the ironic cause of that demise could very well be our own reluctance either to privatize or radically restructure the most socialist enterprise in the Western world, that \$180 billion near-monopoly known as U.S. public education.

Some years ago I asked Nobel economist Milton Friedman why it was, given the appalling and obvious failures of socialism everywhere in the world contrasted with the stunning successes of market capitalism, that most American students still graduated from high school with such a surprisingly socialist perspective. His answer was characteristically clear: "Because they are products of a socialist system — namely public education. How can you expect such a system to inculcate the values of free enterprise and individual entrepreneurship and competition when it is based on monopoly state ownership, ab-

hors competition, and survives only through compulsion and taxation?" (*Imprimis*, April 1990)

Organizing Teachers Worldwide

In an address to the NEA convention on July 8th, Mary Hatwood Futrell, now president of the World Confederation of Organizations of the Teaching Profession, said that delegates to WCOTP's 1990 assembly in Costa Rica voted to start the process of forming a new international organization that would represent all education employees in the world.

The new organization would be called Education International (EI), consist of all current member organizations belonging to WCOTP and the International Federation of Free Trade Unions (IFFTU), and bring together 20 million education employees from 225 teacher unions in over 190 countries, Futrell said.

EI would have a larger staff and better programs to more effectively serve its members, she said, noting that both sides have asked her to be EI president. However, the formation of EI would in no way effect the status or operations of member organizations at their individual national levels, she said, "nor will it affect any merger discussions between NEA and the AFT."

Since 1976 when NEA and AFT state affiliates in New York "merged," leaving only a handful of NEA loyalists to rebuild an education organization with no ties to the AFL-CIO, only three school districts in the country remain "merged" where teachers belong to both NEA and AFT: Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Flint, Mich.

The delegates finally moved to refer to the executive committee New Business Item 41, which calls for NEA to monitor the merger of IFFTU and WCOTP and oppose the merger if IFFTU does not cease "aiding the governments of Central and South America in its

persecution of our fellow teachers that are presently active in WCOTP."

During the debate, a delegate from New York said she was afraid of any affiliation with AFT or its New York City local, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), because their leaders and vice presidents are spokespersons for the Reagan and Bush administrations, they have taken stands against collective bargaining, and have advocated testing procedure changes "because their members are too dumb to administer their own tests."

Another delegate pointed out that while "our beloved Mary" may head the new EI coalition, UFT President Albert Shanker is on the staff of IFFTU, so NEA should exercise extreme caution regarding this world coalition.

On the matter of defeating right-to-work laws, New Business Item 74 states: "The NEA shall participate in coalitions involving unions, especially public-sector unions, whose primary goal is to defeat right-to-work laws or any similar legislation that restricts collective bargaining and limits effective gains by educational employees and all other public-sector workers."

Comment: Isn't it interesting that the public-sector employees, supposedly the "public's servants," will be doing all in their power to defeat the public's wishes. Their true aim is to become the public's master. As for the rivalry between the NEA and the AFT, it represents a battle between the radical leftists of the NEA and the neo-conservatives of the AFT. Albert Shanker is well known for the part he played in wrenching the New York City teachers' union from communist control. He and George Meany represented a strong anti-communist faction within the labor movement and the Democratic Party. As is well known, the communists have always felt it their duty to control the labor

movement in order to control the working class. Lenin said in 1920:

One must be prepared to make all kinds of sacrifices and overcome the greatest obstacles, in order to propagandize and agitate systematically, stubbornly, persistently, and patiently, precisely in those institutions, associations, and unions, even the most reactionary, where there is a proletarian or semi-proletarian mass. . . . One must be prepared . . . in case of necessity, even to resort to all kinds of tricks and ruses, to employ illegal measures, secretiveness, and concealment of truth in order to penetrate into trade unions, to remain in them, and to conduct Communist work in them at any cost. (Counts & Lodge, 1949)

Thus, the greatest obstacle to an NEA-AFT merger is ideology. The NEA is firmly in the hands of the far left who still believe in socialism. The leadership of the AFT represents traditional, anti-communist unionism.

NEA: Political Powerhouse

Never has the NEA been more powerful than it is today and never have its members gained more in salaries and benefits than during the Reagan-Bush years. According to the NEA's own survey of its members, teachers are better educated, work fewer hours and are paid more than at any time in previous years. The average teaching salary is now about \$32,000, a 408 percent increase over 1966's average of \$5,264 and nearly a 30 percent increase from the 1986 average of \$24,504. In 1982-83, the NEA's budget was \$77.5 million. In 1992 it has more than doubled to \$164.3 million.

The 1,340 teachers surveyed by the NEA were required to work during the 1990-91 school year an average of 36.2 hours a week, compared with 36.8 in 1961. The average noncompensated hours worked after school and at home was 9.3 hours, down from 10.8 hours reported in 1966 and 1986.

Elementary teachers reported a drop in the average number of pupils per class: 24, down from 29 in 1961 and 25 in 1981.

About 31 percent of all teachers say they

have an aide or access to one, compared with 29 percent who said they had such assistance in 1971. The greatest increase came among teachers who said they have their own aide: up to 10.2 percent from 4.6 percent in 1971.

More teachers are earning higher degrees now than ever before. According to the survey, more than 50 percent said they have earned at least a master's degree. Only 23 percent of the teachers surveyed in 1961 had earned a master's degree.

Although the NEA has been unable to get its man into the White House since the election of Jimmy Carter, its real power is on the local level where it has been enormously successful in getting its approved candidates into the Congress and the fifty state legislatures. Conservative Republicans cannot match the NEA's efficient political machines organized in each school district of the nation. Only the growth of private education and homeschooling will be able to erode that NEA local power base. And that is why the NEA is fighting so fiercely to limit the growth of private schools and homeschooling.

Living Off the Taxpayer

The Democratic Party has become the party of those special interests that live off the taxpayer. The *Washington Times* of July 25, 1992 reported:

The speakers [at the Democratic convention] all emoted about the poor, about having compassion and about the American dream of starting in a rural Southern town and making it to the top. But the top of what? Other than a few Hollywood celebrities, you would be hard pressed to find a delegate or speaker at the Democratic convention who had made a career in the private sector.

The one thing almost all the Democratic National Convention delegates had in common was their membership in the highly paid (and very profitable) "non-profit" sector, where their paychecks come directly or indirectly from raiding taxpayers' pockets.

This includes government officials and employees, the education establishment and the public-inter-

est and social-service groups that call themselves "non-profit," but actually profit handsomely from government programs.

Nearly two-thirds of the delegates at the Democratic National Convention reported family incomes of more than \$50,000 a year, three-fourths were college graduates and 44 percent had postgraduate degrees. These people have figured out that their cushy lifestyle depends on maintaining the big-spending programs of the Democrats, but that electing Democrats to office depends on pretending to be moderate and adopting the rhetoric of Republicans.

That pretty much says it. In other words, the Democratic Party represents for the most part those who live off the taxpayer and the Republican Party represents for the most part those who work in the private sector, support themselves, and pay the taxes. No wonder Republicans were angry when Bush went back on his no-new-taxes pledge. But Bush now admits that that was a mistake and has pledged to undo the damage.

But no matter how disappointed conservatives have been with Bush, the fact that the NEA will do everything in its power to defeat him will probably mobilize most conservatives in his defense. The thought of an NEA takeover of the presidency and the Dept. of Education is too much of a nightmare for most conservatives. Thus, the outcome of this election will no doubt be determined by the extent to which voters understand the ramifications of a Democratic victory.

Hillary Clinton Promotes "Kiddie Lib"

Hillary Clinton, wife of the Democratic nominee for president and the epitome of the new woman, thinks that children ought to have the right to sue their parents. She has written extensively in favor of expanding the legal empowerment of children, and that is being interpreted as a potential stake in the heart of the family.

"The fact is, once you transfer power out of the hands of the parents you're rather largely going to transfer it into the hands of the state," says Carl E. Schneider, who specializes in family law at the University of Michigan. "The question then is, what makes you think the state is going to do any better job than the parents?"

Last month, a judge in Orlando, Florida, issued what is believed to be an unprecedented ruling: An 11-year-old boy and his lawyers are entitled to argue in court that he should be legally separated from his natural parents and allowed to live permanently with another family.

That prompted Art Buchwald to offer his "worst-case scenario": "Your honor, my client, 13-year-old Sophie Roundabout, wishes to obtain a divorce from her parents and younger sister because of irreconcilable differences. We are asking for 50 percent of all community property and custody of the family dog, Spot."

Those on the cutting edge of change, however, are dead serious. They advocate three fundamental changes, which Clinton outlined in the Harvard Educational Review in 1974: The legal concept of "minority," which refers to the status of non-adult persons, should be abolished and the presumption that children are incompetent to make decisions for themselves should be reversed; all constitutional procedural rights guaranteed to adults should be granted to children; and the presumption that parents' and children's interests are the same should be rejected.

A "competent child should be permitted to assert his or her own interests," Clinton wrote. In describing the child-parent dependency relationship, Clinton wrote that: "Along with the family, past and present examples of such arrangements include marriage, slavery, and the Indian reservation system."

In 1979, Clinton wrote: "I prefer that intervention into an ongoing family be limited to decisions that could have long-term and possibly irreparable effects if they were not resolved. Decisions about motherhood and abortion, schooling, cosmetic surgery, treatment of venereal disease, or employment, and others where the decision or lack of one will significantly affect the child's future should not be made unilaterally by parents."

The argument in favor of increased legal rights for children is based on the belief that "children suffer from an excess of informal, discretionary, sublegal parental authority," says David G. Blankenhorn, president of the Institute for American Values. "I'm sure one can find cases where that is true — when a child is being beaten. But there are already laws about child abuse. Children suffer not from too much parental authority but from too little."

Clinton and others argue that the state's interests are not identical to those of the children, and that therefore children require their own legal representation. Authority over children, or on their behalf, would be shifted not only away from parents but also away from governmental child-welfare agencies. It would be shifted to the courts. "I'd go so far as to say only a lawyer could have thought of this," says Blankenhorn. "I really think this is of lawyers, by lawyers and for lawyers."

Sanford J. Fox of Boston College Law School, who is chairman of a committee on children's rights of the American Bar Association, says those fundamental changes outlined by Clinton are not radical or impractical. "They all make sense," says Fox.

"No child should be able to give up his right to a lawyer until he has seen a lawyer. ... There is nothing to lose by letting the court hear a child's perspective as well as the parents' perspective." (*Boston Globe*, 8/16/92)