

*Samuel
Blumenfeld*

The Review Of The **NEWS**

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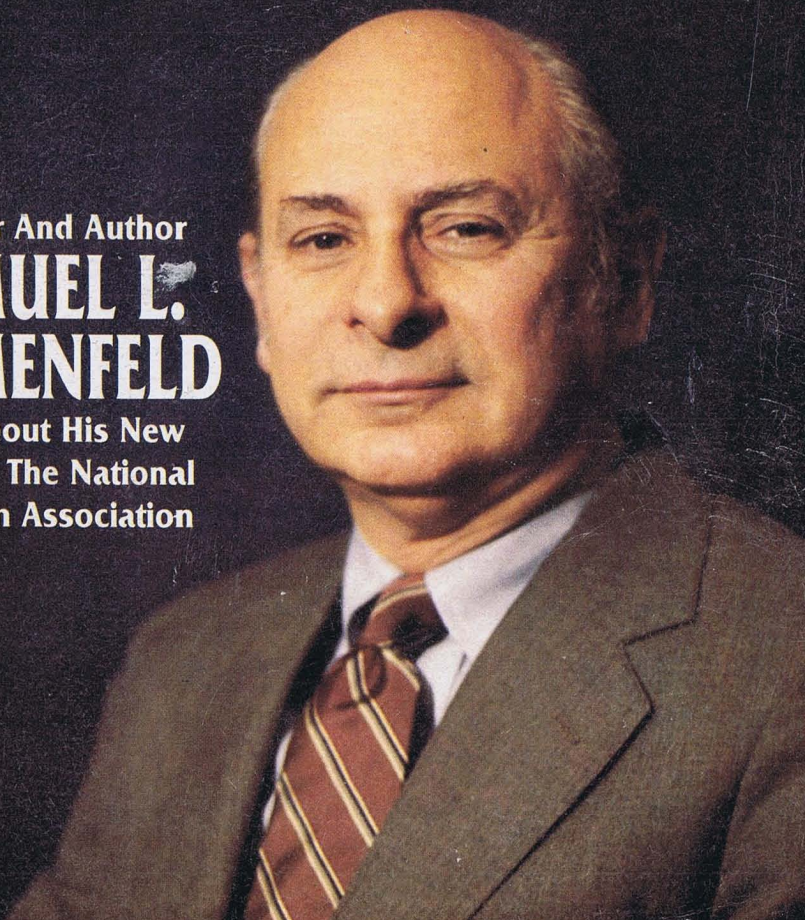
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How The Pro-Soviet Disarmers Plan To Move To The Streets In 1985

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Educator And Author
**SAMUEL L.
BLUMENFELD**

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Education Association



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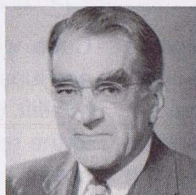
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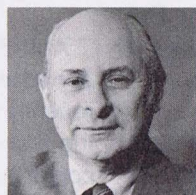
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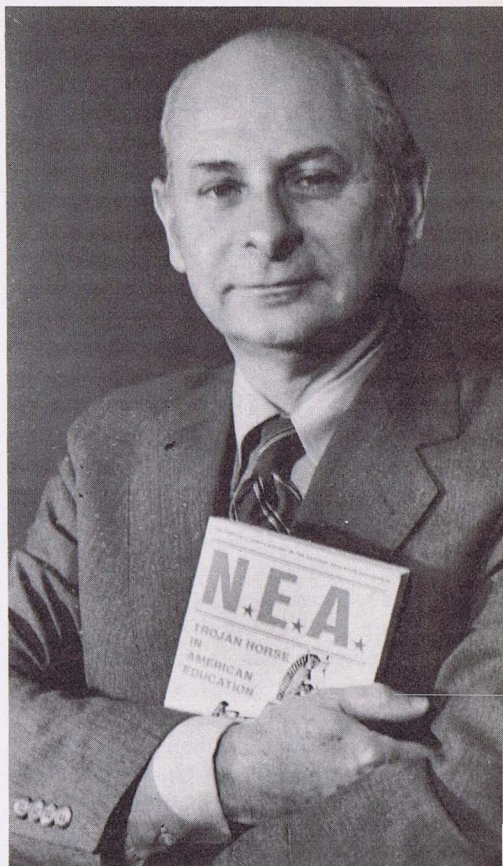
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Author And Educator
SAMUEL L.
BLUMENFELD

**An Exclusive
Interview With
The Distinguished
Critic Of The
National Education
Association On His
Important New Book**

by John Rees

■ SAMUEL L. BLUMENFELD is the author of a new book, *N.E.A.: Trojan Horse In American Education*, which is the first full-length exposé of the National Education Association's pernicious role in poisoning America's public schools. The N.E.A. is a labor union, a powerful lobby, and a professional association. It is at once a political and professional power. And it has



insisted on methods of instruction which have proved effective only in the production of millions of functional illiterates.

Sam Blumenfeld makes a compelling case to show that the N.E.A. leadership and other powerful elements in the public-education establishment are not merely incompetent. Indeed, he says that the N.E.A. has a secret

agenda; that it is consciously using the government schools to help establish a socialist society. And to do that, says Blumenfeld, the socialists behind this effort understood from the beginning that they had to eradicate the independent American mind. Americans were accustomed to drawing their own conclusions after thinking and learning for themselves. Literacy being the key to independent learning and reasoning, the processing of virtually every child born in the U.S. through a public-education system designed to cripple reading skills was and is seen by collectivists as essential.

Born and reared in New York City, Samuel Blumenfeld was graduated from the City College of New York in 1950, studied in France for two years, then worked for many years as a book editor. He has taught in both public and private schools, including a private school for children with learning and behavioral problems.

In 1972, Sam Blumenfeld produced his first book *How To Start Your Own Private School — And Why You Need One*. His subsequent books on American education include *The New Illiterates* (1973); *How To Tutor* (1973); *Is Public Education Necessary?* (1981), which was characterized by *Fortune* magazine as a “brilliant revisionist history”; *Alpha Phonics: A Primer For Beginning Readers* (1983); and, now, *N.E.A.: Trojan Horse In American Education*. Articles by Mr. Blumenfeld have appeared in such publications as *Esquire*; *Reason*; *Inquiry*; *American Education*; *Education Digest*; *Child*

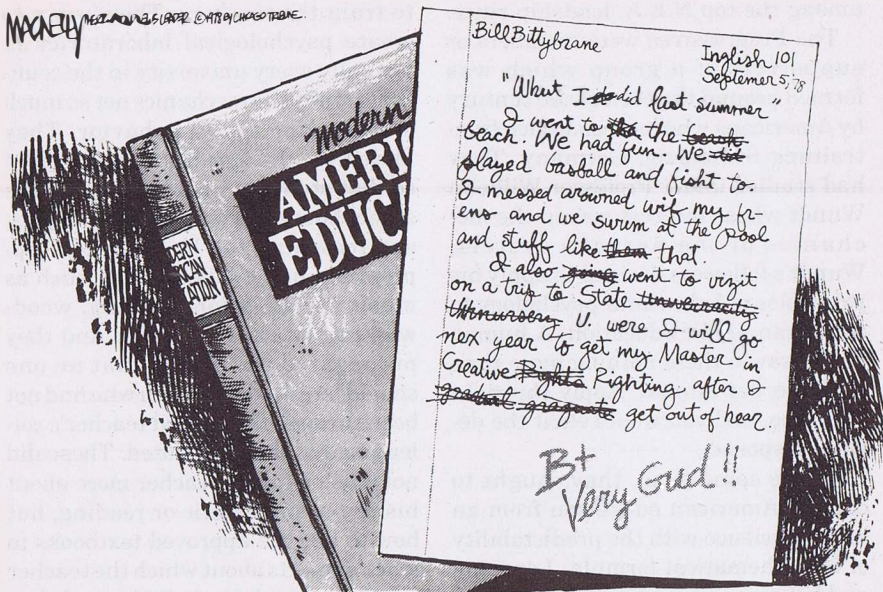
And Family; *Boston Magazine*; and, *The Reading Informer*.

Q. Tell us, Mr. Blumenfeld, what led you to write a book about the National Education Association?

A. Letters from readers of my books and articles, and questions from callers to the many talk shows on which I have been a guest, convinced me that parents are concerned with how and why our public-education system became so abysmally bad. People who now are in their 50s look at the papers their grandchildren bring home marked with an “A” and realize that, when they were themselves in third grade, that sort of work would have been given a “C.” They observe with concern that their children and grandchildren cannot correctly fill in a job-application form, write a simple letter, or read a newspaper story aloud without stumbling over the words. I found that without explaining the role and social experimentation of the N.E.A. I could not make clear how and why things got so bad. Or why, 30 years after publication of Rudolf Flesch’s *Why Johnny Can’t Read*, the situation has only worsened.

Q. Was it the N.E.A. which first decided that the public schools should be the laboratory for social experiments to remold society?

A. Those unfortunate ideas can be traced back from John Dewey and the Progressives to philosophical theories that appeared in the early 1800s. Many came from the teachings of the German philosopher Friedrich Hegel,



who formulated the dialectical process for human moral advancement, a process "liberated" from the moral strictures of the Old and New Testaments. Others came from a social activist in Scotland, Robert Owen, who is sometimes called the father of socialism. Owen, you will recall, proclaimed that mankind is perfectible through the process of education, and that the earlier a child is placed under training, the better the chance of success.

In New England, these theories dovetailed with precepts of Unitarianism. Education, the Unitarians decided, is the only way to solve the problem of evil. Crime, they contended, was the product of ignorance and social injustice. Education would eliminate ignorance, which would

eliminate poverty, which would eliminate social injustice and crime.

With such ideas in the foreground, social activists presenting themselves as educational theorists saw mandatory public education as a means for indoctrinating the nation's children with collectivist precepts. The focus of public-school education became social cooperation and fitting in with the collective group rather than developing independent learning and reasoning capabilities.

Q. Will you describe the impact of John Dewey's "Progressives" on the early N.E.A.?

A. The Progressives had taken over the National Education Association by 1917, and there has not been a single Conservative or Traditionalist

among the top N.E.A. leadership since.

The Progressives were members or supporters of a group which was formed around the turn of the century by Americans who had come back from training in Leipzig, Germany. They had studied under Professor Wilhelm Wundt whose interest was in the mechanics of the nervous system. Wundt's followers decided to apply his principles of behavioral psychology to American public education. A human being was to them nothing more than a high-order animal. Apply the right stimulus, and you would elicit the desired response.

At the same time, they sought to change American education from an art to a science with the predictability of a mathematical formula. Learning and behavior were regarded as synonymous. The human nervous system would "learn" whatever the teacher wished if the correct stimulus was applied. The most notable of these Progressives was, of course, John Dewey.

Q. Yet Dewey couldn't have done it alone.

A. Of course not. He was supported by a rather large clique of behavioral psychologists and socialists who decided to use public education as a means of transforming America from a capitalist society to a socialist one. They built on themes already derived from Hegel and Owen.

Q. How did they manage their takeover of the public-education system?

A. The Progressives moved to establish graduate schools of education

to train the teachers. They began to create psychological laboratories in virtually every university in the country to study the mechanics not so much of reasoning but of behavior. They moved for changes in the curriculum so that students would not spend the school hours learning ideas, concepts, and reasoning, but be trained in "appropriate use of leisure time" such as music appreciation, cooking, wood-working, or arts and crafts. And they propagated the notion that no one should be allowed to teach who had not been through the special teacher's college course they instituted. These did not teach a future teacher more about history or arithmetic or reading, but how to use the approved textbooks to teach subjects about which the teacher might know relatively little. And they began to lobby the state legislatures and school boards to push through their programs. They did this consciously and in a very organized fashion.

Q. Then the Progressives sought to transform our country into a socialist society by keeping whole generations of Americans from studying the history and literature necessary to understand why they should resist collectivism?

A. Yes, and with the added element of relentless pressure for the secularization of America. You see, the American system had been built by a large number of people whose literacy was fundamentally related to the Bible. Through the study of the Bible, their personal, individual relationship with

God became clear to them, and this shaped their personal understanding of morality.

The Progressives were not stupid men. They understood that religion was at the center of American individualism. Socialism and individualism cannot co-exist. Their intellectual descendants are still very big on getting religion out of the schools.

Q. Tell us more about the N.E.A.

A. It is, of course, the largest teachers' organization in the United States. It is a labor union of public-school teachers, negotiating contracts with local school boards and creating agency shops — which means closed shops — requiring that teachers must pay dues to the N.E.A. union. But the N.E.A. is also virtually a political party. It has its own yearly legislative agenda; it has a yearly convention at which its delegates pass all sorts of resolutions. It backs candidates in elections and encourages its members to become delegates to both the Democratic and Republican National Conventions. Its goal, frankly, is to control the Congress and state legislatures of America.

Q. I recall that N.E.A. had the largest bloc of Jimmy Carter delegates at the 1976 Convention — and of course Carter gave N.E.A. the Department of Education it had been seeking for so long. It was a shoddy deal, yet the N.E.A. gets a tremendously favorable treatment in the media. Why is that?

A. In part, it has to do with the fact

that it has been around a very long time. (The N.E.A. was founded in Philadelphia in 1857 at a meeting called by the presidents of 10 state teachers' associations.) But whatever prestige it has gathered over the years is now being undermined. For the first time, the N.E.A. is encountering heavy opposition. Its union tactics are being opposed by many teachers, and its political activities are so blatant and so extensive as to provoke further opposition. If you are going to get into the political kitchen, you have to be prepared to stand the heat. But the N.E.A., which is now in the political kitchen in a very big way, does not like the growing criticism.

Q. How did the evolution of N.E.A. as a political organization come about?

A. If you look at the historical trend, the political commitment of the N.E.A. began as early as 1917 when it moved its headquarters to Washington, D.C., and became a large membership organization. The N.E.A. had grown slowly at first, having 625 members in 1885; but by 1918 it had increased to 10,000. It then created a Legislative Commission to lobby Congress on a full-time basis. From that time to the present, the N.E.A. has determinedly mobilized its national organization and state affiliates to push through legislation favorable to its own interests and to socialism generally.

And remember, John, public schooling is the largest single item in the state budgets. Each state in the United States spends an average of 45

percent of its budget on public education. That money is raised in ever-increasing state taxes which are promoted and backed by the N.E.A.

Q. Has N.E.A.'s activism been increasing?

A. The N.E.A. became even more blatantly political after it officially became a labor union in the 1960s. That move was the product of a challenge from a rival teachers' union, the American Federation of Teachers. Soon the N.E.A.-P.A.C.s were created and began actually to back candidates — something the N.E.A. had never before done openly.

Q. Is the membership of the N.E.A. closely aligned in a political sense with its leadership?

A. Some N.E.A. members have written complaining letters which the N.E.A. has published in its journals. So we know that there are teachers in the National Education Association who are opposed to its collectivist purposes and tend to be Conservative. As a matter of fact, it has been reported that about 50 percent of the N.E.A. members voted for Reagan in 1980, and I would assume a similarly large percentage did so in 1984.

Q. Do you see any significant indication of a Communist influence in N.E.A.?

A. No, I don't. You see, the secular humanists and socialists have a great deal in common with the Communists. First of all, they preceded them. The Progressives began their work before the Russian Revolution. And, while there was a Communist Party, the dif-

ferences between the Progressives and the Communists were simply ones of strategy. The Progressives took the British Labour/Fabian line. They preferred the Fabian strategy of evolution rather than revolution. There were among the Progressives a number who traveled to Russia and espoused the Marxist-Leninist line. But very few of them were positively identified as members of the Communist Party.

It's much easier to identify these people as Fabian Socialists. However, they were easily susceptible to Communist influences, and I assume that there have been Communists among them.

Q. What sort of radical positions does the N.E.A. take?

A. One good example was provided during the last N.E.A. convention, at which a resolution was passed supporting the Sandinista Government of Nicaragua which is a Soviet surrogate promoting Communist revolution throughout Central America. The N.E.A. has sent its own people down there to interview Sandinistas, and its resolutions show that the N.E.A. is very definitely on the side of the radical Left. Also the N.E.A. now maintains extremely cordial relations with its Soviet counterpart. Officials of N.E.A. have traveled to Russia, and Soviet Teachers Union officials have been the N.E.A.'s guests in the United States. So there is a very cordial exchange going on.

In general, as far as I know, the N.E.A. has never criticized the Soviet Union for anything — even the inva-

sion of Afghanistan. It spends a great deal of time criticizing the American Right, but I have not once heard N.E.A. criticize the Left.

Q. Tell us about the N.E.A.'s operations as a trade union.

A. There are two major teachers' unions in this country. The other is the American Federation of Teachers (A.F.T.), which is part of the A.F.L.-C.I.O. and has been led for quite some time by Albert Shanker. But the A.F.T. is much smaller than the N.E.A., which operates in almost every school district in the country. The N.E.A. maintains the strongest lobbies in every state capital; it maintains a very large, influential lobby in Washington, D.C.; and, has a paid staff of professional organizers who travel around the country.

Q. How did N.E.A. attain such strength?

A. By mandating unified membership which requires a teacher who joins a local N.E.A. affiliate to become a member of the state and national organizations. Also, by creating those "agency shops" that force teachers to join N.E.A. as a condition of employment. The N.E.A. pushes through these collective-bargaining laws whereby it is able to be sole representative of the teachers in each district. This gives N.E.A. the power to decide who is to teach and who will not teach.

Also, the N.E.A. is very much involved in trying to control the teachers' colleges, the teacher certification process, the accreditation process, and whatever administrative process will

permit collectivists further to control public education.

Q. And the N.E.A. wants control of the education industry from university teaching to nursery school, and from custodians to textbook production.

A. That would be modest. From my study of N.E.A. resolutions, it is obvious that it is aiming for a total educational dictatorship under which it will be impossible for anyone to teach anybody anything in this country without a license from the N.E.A.

Q. The N.E.A. routinely justifies what it does by saying that its goal is excellence in education. What do you say?

A. That is a joke. A bitter, cruel joke! For all these many years the N.E.A. has been doing nothing but pushing the Progressive line. The Progressives have been interested in one thing only, and that is transforming America from a capitalist into a socialist society. One of the means of doing that, these conspirators felt, was to control public education. They could then indoctrinate our youth at leisure and, in the process, lower the literacy level of the American people.

The Progressives were able to create millions of functional illiterates in America by changing the way reading is taught in the United States. They threw out phonics, and substituted what is called the "look-say" method. And that is the real reason why Johnny can't read.

Q. Look-say method?

A. In hieroglyphic and Chinese

ideographic systems there is one symbol, generally, for each word. A reader of classical Chinese ideographic texts would be confronted with some 30,000 characters to memorize. The system requires a lot of guessing, is very imprecise, and keeps all sophisticated written knowledge in the hands of only a few.

But we have an *alphabet*, with each character (ideally) standing for one generalized sound. As soon as a child understands that, he or she is ready through phonics to translate groups of letters into the spoken words they represent, just as musical notes can be translated into a tune. Look-say, the darling scheme of the Progressives, replaced the phonics system and reverted to the confusions inherent in hieroglyphics. But woe to the heretic who raises his voice and produces studies that prove the absolute inferiority and destructiveness of look-say.

Q. Is that the "See Jane; See Dick" nonsense?

A. It is. And endless, mind-killing repetition is the key to look-say.

The first of Dr. William Scott Gray's "Dick And Jane" primers was published in 1930. At least the Depression kept most school systems from using them until the old phonic primers fell apart. Gray's first primer taught only 68 sight words expanded into a story of 565 words. Twenty years later, Gray was teaching only 58 sight words expanded into a story of 2,613 words. It proved crippling.

Q. Just how bad is it?

A. Our public schools, John, have

graduated some 25 million functional illiterates. This testifies to the fact that the program of the N.E.A. and its Progressive friends is not educational but social and political. It has nothing to do with excellence in education. And there will be no improvement in the foreseeable future as far as academic excellence is concerned. These people are only interested in power. They couldn't care less whether children learn.

Q. What can be done to curb the power of the N.E.A.?

A. The first step is to make Americans aware of the amount of power the N.E.A. has, what its goals are, what it is doing, and that it is a dangerous organization. Once that is done, Americans will start to look at those National Education Association initiatives more critically.

Next, it is essential that concerned citizens organize and become politically active. Run for election not just to your state legislature, but to your local, county, and state school boards. Fight for a curriculum that teaches reading by the effective, proven, phonics method. Fight the selection of pernicious textbooks. Solid basic skills are what is needed.

Second, teachers should question their affiliation with the N.E.A. Obviously, the most effective way to curtail its power would be for teachers to leave it. That won't happen until they are convinced that the organization is up to no good. I hope many will read my book and come to that conclusion. ■ ■