

New Plan for Unhindered Teaching

Education

Professors Would Rank Colleges on Academic Freedom

AROUSED by encroachments on academic freedom that have occurred in the last few years, professors of universities and colleges are being urged to place in operation a plan that will put teeth in the demands of the American Association of University Professors that teaching be unhindered by social taboos.

The plan proposed by Prof. L. L. Thurstone of the University of Chicago, a member of the association's committee which investigated the recent dismissal of University of Missouri professors in connection with a sex questionnaire, contemplates a list of "accredited" universities and colleges maintained by the association. Freedom of scholarly and scientific inquiry would rank equally with professional competence of the staff and collegiate level of instruction.

If, in the opinion of an investigating committee, academic freedom were curtailed in any institution, the offending college would be removed from the accredited list.

Professors who subsequently join the faculty of an unaccredited college would lose membership not only in the American Association of University Professors but in their professional, scientific and academic societies as well.

Universities would be replaced on the accredited list only when the cause for removal has been corrected. If a professor were dismissed, the university would need to restore him to his former position and pay back salary in full.

Heretofore the university professors have confined themselves to investigating and reporting on violations of academic freedom, in the hope that resulting publicity would correct the situation. In the case of the dismissal and suspension of faculty members of the University of Missouri, a committee consisting of Prof. A. J. Carlson, physiologist of the University of Chicago, Prof. Percy Bordwell, of the University of Iowa, Prof. John H. Gray of American University, Washington, D. C., and Prof. L. L. Thurstone of the University of Chicago, investigated and condemned the action of university authorities as a breach of academic freedom. Other instances have had the attention of association committees.

"In dealing with this problem we must face the fundamental difference between the mores of the society that supports a university

and the ideals and objectives of the scientist," said Prof. Thurstone. "The scientist investigates as objectively as possible the phenomena in his field of special interest, and if his inquiries trespass on the mores of the society that supports him, he is in trouble. He has sinned and is regarded as an immoral influence on the young innocents whom he should be guiding into the ways of righteousness. Here logic does not count. If the public abhor evolution as sinful, we shall only make matters worse by starting an argument with them.

"The history of science is repeating itself. The honest inquiries of Galileo about the physical aspects of the universe trespassed on the taboos of his time, so Pope Urban declared that 'it is a question of the most godless business which could ever be discussed—that the doctrine was in the highest degree sinful.' Charles I in France forbade the possession of furnaces and apparatus necessary for chemical processes, and Henry IV did the same in England. A Birmingham mob and an Anglican clergyman wrecked the home of Priestley, destroyed his library and instruments, and drove him into exile. The teachings of Linneus about the sexual system in plants were for many years prohibited in the papal states and elsewhere in Europe. But in 1773 permission was given that they be discussed in Rome.

"The present day conflict between science and superstition is seen in the legislative attempts against evolution and vivisection. The social scientist who inquires about the sex code on which we have built our system of morality finds that he also violates popular taboos. The economist who investigates or lectures about unpopular economic theory or about socialism may find himself in trouble with the trustees and with the 'one-hundred percenters' in society. The historian who aims to discover the truth about our historical heroes may find that the public does not want to have its idols shattered. The scholar who ventures into biological and social phenomena is likely to have trouble with superstition and prejudice."

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