

History Teachers' Forum

THINKING INDEPENDENTLY

There is a common, though not necessarily expressed, belief that successful persons are those who readily take on the color of the community and who just as readily join the militant defenders of the *status quo*. Any man or woman of intelligence and experience can easily understand the sources of the ideas of such supposedly successful persons after hearing them converse for a few minutes. To the uninitiated, these fluent purveyors of current notions and representatives of prevailing attitudes seem alert, clever and effective citizens. The truth is that they are superficial or will rapidly become so. They do not have deep or abiding interests. They do not think much. They are easy victims of propagandists. Nevertheless, college graduates constantly join their ranks, among whom there are all too many teachers of history.

Young men and women who have specialized in history as undergraduate and graduate students, preparatory to teaching careers, should find their training especially helpful as they are constantly confronted with the necessity of judging propaganda. They should know how to check and weigh what they hear and read. They should, while taking their training, have caught the spirit of those who form their opinions on the basis of the evidence, and they should have acquired considerable ability to find the facts even when reading the columns of prejudiced journalists or news gatherers. Otherwise as teachers of history, they are bound to become, to a greater or lesser degree, blind leaders of the blind.

The teacher trained for history work should have a correct knowledge of the matter to be presented, but should have also the desire and the ability to learn more from day to day and to learn by sanely critical methods. The teacher who gives up study as soon as the degree has been obtained proves thereby the lack of the principal thing that should have been acquired. Even the teacher who continues to read, but does not exercise the critical faculty deserves little praise.

Everywhere there are people who have supposedly been well educated that gradually become uneducated. The explanation is that they do not read enough; that they do not judge critically what they read and hear; and that they accept without question the views of others. This is one of the common

tragedies in the lives of those who enter the teaching profession. The same thing is true of approximately an equal proportion of those who enter other professions and trades, except where the regular activities necessarily require constant study and experimentation. The very nature of some professions, such as banking, the law, and teaching, tends to dull and mechanize the minds of those who enter them. That is why it is generally possible to predict what so many persons with experience and education will say relative to any departure from established practice before they speak. Constant study, an open mind, and a tolerant spirit are the necessary bases of growth.