

# MSU President Hannah Defends American School System Methods

Michigan State University's President John A. Hannah does not believe American educational methods and study courses need serious overhaul to meet the Sputnik science of Russia. He believes this can be accomplished better by considerable improvement in the American public's attitude toward the educational profession, its teachers and faculties, and their position in and value to the community.

Hannah's remarks were made at the 90th annual meeting of the Michigan press association on the MSU campus.

The appearance in the skies of the Russian satellites has focused public attention upon our educational system. The beep-beep of the Sputniks has awakened Americans to the realization that a strong educational system and adequate educational institutions are vitally important to our nation's well-being and security.

Since October 4, there has been a great deal of talking, speechmaking, and editorializing about education.

I should like to take a few minutes of your time in which to sort out some of the charges and to analyze some of the component factors of the unhappy situation in which we find ourselves.

It is charged that we are not turning out enough scientists and engineers. This is not news. Educators, scientists, and some of our leaders charged with our national defense have been saying this for years and offering data to prove the point.

THEY HAVE BEEN warning that we were in a race with the Communists in the fields of science and technology and that we not only require increasing numbers of scientists, engineers, and other technicians, but that they must be of the highest possible quality. The trouble has been that only the Russians and a few Americans believed it.

It is charged that our educational system is inadequate, needs drastic overhauling, has failed to keep up with the times, etc. In response to this charge, I would point out:

First, this is the same educational system that has made ours the most productive country in the world and has given us the highest standard of living ever known on this earth.

FROM THIS same educational system now under attack have come the scientists, engineers, and technicians who released the power of the atom and harnessed it for both military and peaceful uses; these are the people who gave the world the sulfa drugs, Salk vaccine, and other scientific triumphs; these are the same people whose scientific and technological skills have for more than a decade kept America and the free world secure and its enemies at bay through its power to retaliate against any aggressors.

Second, at least some educators have long recognized and accepted the need for continual revision of our educational system and course offerings and have tried to avert the public to the dangers of an appalling waste of talent and brainpower through our failure to assure adequate education for our ablest youth.

THIRD, programs to improve the teaching of science and mathematics have been pushed forward against the resistance of public lethargy and indifference to their

must always think about budgets and taxes, and try to win public acceptance of new expenditures and new programs. Some of today's loudest critics of inadequate expenditures for scientific research and development were the loudest in demanding government action to increase taxes on the economy and reduced taxes in recent years when these very decisions were being taken.

Presumably we could have launched an earth satellite much earlier, but we decided to give priority to other things and even a year ago we certainly were not planning to spend millions for more and better education for our young people.

THESE QUALITIES are characteristic of dictatorial government; we have had to contend against them before, and doubtless will again. A democracy is always under a handicap in this respect.

In times of war, we agree to surrender certain powers to our central government, but absolute control of people's lives and the strict regimentation of their activities have always been recognized by Americans.

This dislike for central control, this dispersion of political power, is reflected in education especially. We have a high degree of diversification, with private and public, large and small colleges and universities.

They all have one thing in common: they serve us so well in private citizens, even the large public universities. This is true at the elementary and high school level, too.

TEACHERS are hired, policies made, and courses of study determined by boards of education made up of local citizens or by administrators responsible directly to them.

No central agency of government, in Lansing or Washington, can decree that science or mathematics be emphasized, or command that our educational system produce a certain number of engineers, or chemists, or mathematicians, or physicists each year.

Let Russia have its uniform standards imposed by central authority. Let us hold tightly to our belief that the collective judgments of thousands of free men and women, expressed through their school boards, boards of trustees, boards of regents or whoever must ultimately prove superior to the judgment of one man or a small group of men, conditioned always by the belief that the citizen should serve the state rather than the state the citizen as we have long believed.

One more comparison between the Russian and American systems. The Russians operate under a plan of what we might call controlled motivation. They can arbitrarily decree that certain classes or groups of professional people are to have certain material and social advantages denied to other groups, including high salaries, better housing, better food and automobiles for personal use.

Just now, they lavish such favors on their scientists and professors with the result that it is not too difficult to interest young Russians in becoming scientists and teachers and to induce them to work hard to achieve eminence in those fields.

We, on the other hand, tradition-

ally have left motivation largely to chance and changing circumstances. For example, ministers and priests have certain prestige and social status, but we do not pay them much money for the important work they do.

DOCTORS and lawyers face somewhat better than ministers. Government workers cannot honestly aspire to wealth, and teachers knowingly forgo hope of great material rewards when they enter the profession.

Speaking generally, only business and industry can hold out the promise of substantial material rewards for intelligence and ability of higher order and this explains why so many scientists and engineers find government and industry far more attractive than the college campus.

So much for a brief analysis of the situation in which we find ourselves. The big question is: What can we do about it?

Many answers have been suggested, and there is time to mention only a few of them.

ONE PROPOSAL is that we establish broad programs of scholarships to enable the intelligent youngster from the family of limited means to go on to college after high school.

Most certainly we must encourage every means at our command to enable the able youngsters whose potential contribution might otherwise be lost to society. But we must keep in mind that it would be useless to recruit additional thousands of candidates for higher education unless we have the facilities to care for them.

Few if any major colleges and universities have room to spare in their classrooms and laboratories today, and we face a tremendous increase in the numbers of qualified youngsters seeking to be admitted to college.

This crisis is close upon us. In our own state of Michigan, the number of freshmen in our high schools last year was approximately 74 per cent. larger than the number of seniors.

THIS MEANS that in 1951, we can expect 174 to apply for admission to college for every 100 who applied last fall—and 1951 is just three years away. This year's high school freshman class is substantially larger than last year's class, but exact figures are not yet available.

A comprehensive program of scholarship, desirable as it is, would serve to raise higher the wave of enrollments soon to break upon our campuses.

Unless relief is forthcoming immediately, further stimulation of college attendance would serve to intensify the critical nature of the situation in which colleges and universities find themselves today.

HERE AT Michigan State University at least a quarter of all of our teaching is done in classrooms and laboratories built as temporary wooden barracks or quonset huts after World War II.

They are inadequate to the degree that no self-respecting community would tolerate them for their high schools, and yet we are trying to educate in them the scientists and engineers and leaders in other fields upon which our fu-

ture national security and prosperity depend.

We have had plans for needed engineering and other structures ready for years, and yet the people of Michigan have chosen, through their legislature, not to face up to this problem.

Buildings cannot be put up overnight. Their planning is a long, time-consuming process. It takes time for architects and engineers to turn ideas and suggestions into blueprints and specifications.

IT TAKES time to bid, and it takes time to translate plans and specifications into buildings. On the average, it takes three years of time to plan and build an academic building, and time is a luxury not now ours to enjoy.

Another problem facing our educational system is the shortage of qualified college teachers. One of the first things that should be done is to provide substantial programs of scholarship and fellowship assistance to induce bright youngsters now in college to take up college teaching with its existing educational requirements as a life work.

There is a real need to raise faculty salaries substantially to keep those teaching and researchers we now have and to attract back to our campuses some of those who have left to work with the government and in private industry.

ALMOST AS important as better salaries in making careers in teaching and research attractive is the need for more respect to those who choose education as their life work.

Disparaging references to all professors as egg heads, impractical dreamers, and the like may further discourage the truly promising and able. We need, if we are not to consume our seed corn, to devise procedures that will encourage the very ablest to become college teachers and researchers.

These are some of the elements of the situation confronting education, especially higher education, on the state and national scene. Before we meet together again a year from now, decisions will have been made on some of these questions, because decisions cannot wait long and leisurely consideration.

To realize the urgency of the situation, we need to remind ourselves that the men who produced the Russian Sputniks were students only 10 or 20 years ago.

WHAT HAPPENED to Russian education in the last decade is now reflected every day on the pages of our newspapers. What happens in American schools, colleges, and universities this year and next year will influence the state of the world only a few years hence.

The decisions to be made are decisions bearing upon us and our children; they are such grave decisions that not just a few educators or editors or government officials, if the American people must participate in making them, not just a few educators or editors or government officials, if the American people must participate in making them, not just a few educators or editors or government officials, if the American people must participate in making them.

institution or agency bearing a greater responsibility to insure that they are fully informed than the press of America.

All the data you require are available to you: all of the facts and figures have long since been put in reports and reference books; conditions in our schools, colleges, and universities are there for you to see.

Yours is the primary responsibility to present these facts, to inform your readers, and I hope to arouse your readers to action.

Given the right information, given the true facts, unadorned by propaganda and special pleadings, the American people will make the right decisions. And once they do, then we can and will move ahead to regain our scientific and technological superiority and spread across the free world a shield no enemy can shatter.

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