

INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM: A PROPOSED STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLE

These are days when freedom of inquiry is threatened from many quarters. In periods of crisis, when external or internal forces appear to threaten the community, men tend to seek security by enforced conformity of thought and action. The right of the individual to question, inquire, criticize, advocate and communicate comes under suspicion because it permits modes of thinking and expression that do not conform. Intellectual freedom is still paid lip service as a dynamic force, but by its nature it tends to aggravate feelings of uncertainty and ferment which stimulate fears of the processes of social change. In this context, men inspired by fear attempt to suppress intellectual freedom in the mistaken belief that thereby their security will be preserved.

This belief is mistaken because it is precisely times of crisis that demand the clearest thinking, the fullest consideration of consequences, the fullest cooperation, and the most whole-hearted participation by all people.

Intellectual activity, when free and untrammelled, is a powerful dynamic factor and the ultimate source of strength and survival in a democracy. For this reason it is treasured and protected by free men; in return it yields a rich harvest to the society which nurtures it. Democracy and intellectual freedom are inseparable and indivisible.

In return for their freedom, teachers, scholars, scientists, artists, writers, owe a great responsibility to society. By and large they accept this responsibility whole-heartedly; their lives are devoted to developing and testing ideas, to guiding youth, and to exposing falsity. If they tolerate differences, or opposing points of view, it is because the fullest presentation of the facts, the fullest exploration of the possibilities, is essential to progress. No pressure of outside force or

influence could increase their determination to discover truth and discredit falsehood. They must seek truth and understanding, and they must declare what they believe to be true and right, trusting rational criticism of free men to verify their findings or to uncover their errors. And the freedom of students to learn depends on this freedom of investigation and on their free access to the results of investigation. By the processes of free inquiry and free communication a democratic society moves steadily forward to higher levels of material and spiritual well-being for all its members.

It follows, then, that all forms of interference with intellectual freedom--loyalty oaths, censorship, restrictions on free speech, surveillance and intimidation--are inimical to the true interests of democracy. They devitalize and destroy the basic process from which a free society derives its greatest strength and its capacity to survive. No other form of society with which we are familiar has such capacity to release the potentialities of the human spirit and to marshal them in the service of mankind.

The meaning of these principles in our contemporary situation is that freedom of inquiry is not a reward, held out by society or educational administrators for conformity to any given substantive doctrines, political, religious, or other. It is one of the precious sources of moral and material welfare which up to now have distinguished our form of society. No test of conformity, therefore, should be used by government, or by educational administrators to infringe upon freedom of thought, freedom of inquiry, freedom of teaching, or freedom of communication.

It is this freedom that differentiates the process of a free society from totalitarian control of thought.