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HOW BOLD AN ADVENTURE

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A vexatious USOE vocational education policy has asserted itself in Illinois and Iowa -- which may even be good news for Agricultural Education if it remembers what happened to Franz Josef of Austria-Hungary.

Back in their home barracks, the troops have a breather to evaluate the lessons they learnt on the banks of the Sangamon in Springfield and in the snows at Des

Moines. Strategically, the Ag Education regulars found themselves boxed-in as they took part in the USOE exercise, "Bold Adventure." There is no doubt that agricultural education was kept fully extended during both skirmishes. And now with a lull in the action, intelligence reports are getting a good working-over.

But then, this is the soldiers lot!

Generals Venn and Allan (or whoever is in Command Staff Headquarters these days) conceived the Illinois and Iowa exercises not so much as a test of stamina as it was a test of strategic mobility. It was a bold calculation. And if it eventually doesn't come off, it will be because agricultural education knows enough about salami tactics not to put themselves under the slicer.

If intelligence is correct, it appears that the USOE command staff was beset with a certain sense of claustrophobia which very well might point to the underlying reason for the dog-baiting tactics that accompanied the exercises. Namely, the USOE was so up-tight that it was willing to sacrifice the integrity of one or more of the service units to strengthen its position for the impending battle with the USDL for sovereignty over vocational education.

Perhaps this sounds like a dramatic way of explaining the devisive Springfield and Des Moines actions. However, one thing is clear: the USOE adopted a strategy that was aimed at securing and maintaining administration over all vocational education, pre-school to the grave. Its tactics were straightforward: mobilize a unified Vocational Education Division at all costs. The outcome has been equally straightforward. Agricultural Education has been the recipient of some rather vicious bayonet-sticking. To date, the leveling-down process ("total emphasis" not deemphasis, it's called) has taken its greatest toll in the severing of agricultural education's logistic tail. It belongs, for the time being, to an administrative commune.

The exercises highlight some of the problems facing agricultural education in reconciling a new strategy. Just

why the command staff within agricultural education -- state staff, deans to educators -- chose to move so slowly in extending curricular offerings beyond the production perimeter is anyone's guess. Shrinkages in farm production and territory, curricularly, were accepted fait accompli. Curricular offerings grew defensive. The strategy was not unlike that of Emperor Franz Josef of Austria-Hungary. Like him, agricultural education command staff has an inkling that the old empire needed repairing. Like him, too, they were desperately reluctant, in most cases, to make any radical strategy changes.

Since the limits of what was taught (and to whom) had become sacrosanct the outcome in Illinois and Iowa seemed quite predictable. That is, agricultural education could be counted on withdrawing into curricular and service areas where the ratio of subject matter to student population was growing less favorable each day.

Just as predictable were the actual battles. Research money and a bit of vocational dog-baiting at free institutes assured the outcome of the first battle . . . a new glider club had been found. Illinois continues to lick its wounds after the July 1969 Putsch. With Illinois under its belt the 'totalists' showed their real color with a public castration of Iowa agricultural education. Quite clearly, the Iowa incident is a signal that totalist forces in vocational education are quite ready to bury agricultural education to reinforce their internal (USOE) empire. And if Iowa is any indication, the tactics attempted in other states will be less subtle and more provocative than those used by Generals Venn and Allan.

What is puzzling is why blood need be shed and why the totalists seem to have lost view of their main goal, namely, maintaining integrity in the nation's vocational education programs. Surely there must be a more rational process than setting fire to vocational education.

Perhaps this is asking too much of the harassed men in Washington. But given the domestic problems of the growth in vocational education (including the in-house power aspirations between the services), and the impending

clash with the USDL, they have incentive enough to try. Of course, it would require a great deal of imagination; imagination which men uncertain of their position may not have.

For agricultural education the path is clear: mobility must be brought to curricular offerings coupled with providing the educational teeth necessary to maintain integrity in existing training programs.

The exercise in Illinois and Iowa points to some answers agricultural education need consider in the next round of encounters. To compensate for the slack, in curricular mobility, programs need to be made sensitive to areas where the ratio of subject matter to potential student population is considerably better than in production agriculture. The boys, grades 9 through 12; syndrome remains a reality in far too many schools. All twelve grades and either sex are fair game for either curriculum components or complete courses. It's all out there: teaching color harmony (K-12) with live material in natural settings. Exploring the geometry of nature (K-12). Dusting-off green biological principles (4-12) with practical in or out-of-school exercises. Or providing / coordinating environmental ecology instruction (K-12) with individual and group projects. The entire area of consumer education/protection can become a very relevant and interesting offering for student and teacher alike with agricultural instructors providing the instructional leadership.

With some imagination (which there is) and some very critical logistical support (which may not be so readily available) an extensive effort needs to be mobilized to move agricultural instruction into new schools, particularly junior high schools and metropolitan area schools. The immediate (short-run) cost of this effort should be borne by the Colleges of Agriculture. Colleges are mentioned for two reasons. First, total or comprehensive vocational education programs will get first call when it comes to State / Federal Vocational Education funds (research and development, teacher training, etc.), i. e. agricultural education per se will be left to scrap. Second, Agricultural Colleges are perhaps the single most responsible

parties to keeping the doors shut to non-production management curricular areas and non-rural student populations (recruitment activities rarely take to the streets of urban America). The Agricultural Colleges have a moral and economic obligation in this time of crisis.

To assist in scaling-up production oriented programs, who either have or are in the process of going urban, new curricular carriers are needed coupled with some rather extensive teacher in-service training. Experiments by some schools (necessity rather than the University was the mother of these programs in more cases than not) indicate that one and two semester courses show much more saleability among all student levels than what we have now: 2 to 4 year lock-step programs that ignore the graduation / continuing education facts of life. The range in course titles these one or two semester courses carry is indicative of their student appeal and instructor imagination: Mechanics for Consumers (girls), Environmental Ecology, Flower Design, Basic Mechanics (special needs level), and Individual Study -- where students do their own thing, e.g. a job or studying alongside a park district botanist working with pollution tolerant plantings along expressways.

But imagining these programs and making them tactically operational are two quite different tasks. Just how the programs and their various components should be used is beginning to sort itself out, but getting them operational is presenting another crop of problems. Chief among these is the situation developing among teachers / programs that go through a rural-suburban transition. Agricultural program offerings are becoming normalized in suburban / urban schools with only limited practical work reinforcement which is casting doubt on the vocational integrity of these program offerings. Ten month teaching contracts coupled with increased student-teacher load are also compounding the problems of teachers faced with sorting out the juxtaposition of program components in a metropolitan milieu. The situation is further acerbated by a genuine lack of experienced personnel, state and university, to assist in metropolitan program developments.

To compensate for personnel constraints and a short logistic tail two options appear open. Each can be immediately implemented by teacher training institutions with possible minimal state funds for support. First, schools possessing exemplary work study programs in suburban/urban areas must be more fully utilized by agricultural teacher training institutions for the next crop of teachers. Initially, this might mean that some teachers might serve all or a portion of their student teaching experience in a school not offering agricultural coursework, but does have an exemplary occupational work-study program. It is suggested that this latter path is more acceptable than waiting several years till new schools are developed. Second, continuing in-service industry work experience programs, carrying full university credit, should be initiated (if already not) accompanied by a vigorous personalized enrollment effort to enlist participation from teachers in urban and suburban schools. Community sensitivity needs to be maintained in these teacher work experience programs, that is, participants should be kept out of university classrooms and in local firms where they can begin to establish necessary contacts for future student work study programs and do a bit of re-thinking on just what it takes to survive in today's job market.

Quite clearly the brightest spot in the Illinois and Iowa exercises was the almost immediate support mobilized to re-establish and strengthen FFA options. A rationality prevailed that didn't give way under the cost-benefit job oriented technical-skills barrages of the totalists. The marketplace punctuated arguments of the totalists were rhetorically impressive: agricultural education undoubtedly could field a program that was economically more efficient, served more people, and was more sensitive to technological turn-over.

What was forgotten or perhaps never learned by Generals Venn and Allan was the fact that agricultural education had nibbled on the same choice skills morsels during the Second World War and chose to avoid them in constructing the foundation of their program. While the cannons of skills promised a defense to technological turn-over they soon proved both extravagantly costly and secondary to what industry and the community both wanted: graduates

equipped with an appreciation and respect for the integrity of good workmanship and a positive attitude towards life--the glue that ultimately holds society and the marketplace together. In this sense, then, agricultural education came through Springfield and Des Moines intact . . . however, the outcome of the battle is still hanging fire.

As the men who matter in agricultural education get at the job of re-working her infrastructure they'll find her foundation (marketplace priorities) sound. However, they should consider what happened to the old Emperor. He doggedly fought change. And for a while succeeded beyond all expectations. But when he finally went, the whole ramshackle old apartment house, that he so lovingly tinkered with, collapsed like a house of cards.

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