PS for 2/8/90

Look Who's Censoring Books!

John Buchanan, chairman of the lobby group called People for the American Way (PAW) appeared before the Alabama State Textbook Committee recently to urge censoring a 1989 supplementary science book called *Of Pandas and People* by Percival Davis, Dean Kenyon and Charles B. Thaxton.

What made this event so amusing is that PAW, which was founded by Norman Lear, has been carrying on a flamboyant national advertising campaign, with TV ads and direct-mail solicitations, opposing what it calls the "censorship" of books used in public schools or libraries. But when it came to the matter of this supplementary book for 10th grade Alabama public school students, PAW came down hard on the side of banning it from science classrooms.

Of Pandas and People was offered to Haughton Publishing Company of Dallas for inclusion on the list of state-approved books which may be bought by public schools with state education funds. It was not suggested that the book be required or that it be adopted as the sole or even the primary science textbook.

Thousands of parents had complained to the State Board of Education that all the science textbooks currently used in Alabama public schools exclusively teach evolution as the only acceptable theory of life's origins. *Of Pandas and People* was written to conform to the guidelines in the U.S. Supreme Court's most recent decision about origins, *Edwards v. Aguillard*, as well as the Alabama State Board of Education policy that teachers may present "various scientific theories about the origins of life."

At this hearing, Buchanan called *Pandas* a "creationist tract" and said it "would breach the walls of church-state separation and use public schools as branch offices of their churches." He did not explain how the book could do this, since *Pandas* does not mention God, church, creation, or the supernatural.

Pandas identifies evolution and a theory and analyzes scientific information said to support both the evolution theory and an alternate theory for the origin of life, which *Pandas* calls "intelligent design." This is the theory that organisms started with "a blueprint, a plan, a pattern, devised by an intelligent agent."

The book does not purport to give final answers to the question of biological origins, but is intended to be a balanced and intellectually honest treatment. Using a method of inquiry widely used in the sciences, the book presents students with fact as fact (such as fossil record), theory as theory, and stimulates them to draw their own conclusions.

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It was just this type of non-religious, non-dogmatic approach which the U.S. Supreme Court called for in *Edwards v. Aguillard*. The publisher of *Pandas* presented an impressive list of testimonials from scientists from a wide variety of universities, including Brandeis, Oxford, Princeton, Yale, Texas A&M, and the University of Texas.

Before the Textbook Committee voted, the publisher's attorney withdrew the book from consideration so that no action was taken on the book. The attorney, Francis H. Hare Jr., cited two reasons for his action.

First, State Superintendent of Education Wayne Teague made several highly prejudicial and hostile remarks to the Committee, 73 percent of those members where his own appointees. Teague called *Pandas* "another effort to circumvent some Supreme Court rulings that bar religion from public school classrooms."

The second reason cited by Hare was that the Textbook Committee adopted an unfair procedure for the hearing which did not comply with the Alabama Administrative Procedures Act and which denied the publisher due process and the opportunity to respond to its accusers.

One member of the Textbook Committee, Norris Anderson of Birmingham, resigned because of what he called the "unfair way" in which the public hearing was conducted. Anderson, who has been a high school teacher and textbook writer, argued that *Pandas* would let schoolchildren think for themselves.

We will be watching People for the American Way's next annual report on censorship to see if *Of Pandas and People* is listed as one of the books censored during 1990.

The book takes its name from the way the lovable panda surprised scientists about its origins. From the time scientists began classifying living things into different species, scientists had split 50-50 on whether the giant panda and the smaller red panda were in the bear family or the racoon family.

A 1964 study is now accepted as the definitive interpretation: the giant panda is a bear but the red panda is a racoon. The conclusion is that any evolutionary relationship between the two is highly speculative.