PeS0 to the NEWS

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TEXTBOOKS & PARENTS

he year 1974 was one of our country's most newsworthy years - including the first resignation of a President and his succession by a President and Vice President who were not elected by the people.

Yet, the event with the greatest potential for changing our lives was none of these things, but rather a remarkable speech de

·liv.ered in December by the U.S. Education Commissioner, Terrel H. Bell.· Speaking to the Association of America Publishers, Mr. Bell .,called on textbook publishers to print only "materials that do not insult the values of most parents." He specifically mentioned the Bible;.. McGuffey's Readers, and the Wizard of Oz as examples of books that both tell interesting stories and teach worthwhile values.

Commissioner Bell never mentioned the West Virginia textbook con troversy, but in a real sense his speech was a vindication of the · protesting parents there. He put his finger on the two principal is.sues in that dispute: (1) whether mere parents should have the right. to veto their children's textbooks, and (2) whether the schools have the right to require textbooks that offend the parents' religious,. mor l, and patriotic values.

he American public has been led to believe that the West Vir ginia controversy is between a group of red-neck fundamentalist preach ers ·a d forward-looking educators striving to drag a backward people into the 20th century. Intelligent discussion of the pros and cons is: badly handicapped by the fact that the American public rea·lly has

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no idea of what is in the textbooks being challenged. The magazine ,EI)ITOR AND PUBLISHER admitted that there isn't "any newspaper in general circulation that is prepared to print the stuff verbatim."

The people in West Virginia know, however, because the parents ran excerpts from the offensive books in a fullpage ad in the CHARLESTON GAZETTE. It speaks for itself -- in profanities, obsceni ties, blasphemies, vulgarities, disrespect for parents, tolerance of violence, drinking and dope, and ungrammatical English.

ln taking the position that such things do not belong in text books used in grade schools and high schools, the West Virginia parents do not suffer from the myopia once so aptly defined by the Herman Kahn of the Hudson Institute. He said that many intellectuals lose the ability to distinguish,between black and white whenever there are several shades of gray in between.

In protesting these affronts,the West Virginia parents are merely following the direct approach that enabled other groups to demand justifiable censorship of books they find offensive, such as LITTLE BLACK S.AMBO, OLIVER TWIST, and THE GODFATHER.

It would be a mistake to consider the West Virginia textbook controversy a local matter. The textbooks at issue are published by the country's top publishers and the same books are used in schools all over the country.

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