

NCTE - Anglo American Seminar

CARNEGIE CORPORATION OF NEW YORK

RECORD OF INTERVIEW

SUBJECT Teaching of English

DATE 2/2/64

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PARTICIPANTS Albert Kitzhaber and PC

LOCATION: telephone

PC called to get AK's view of the relationship between the NCTE and the MLA. AK said that as outgoing president of the NCTE he has recommended that the two organizations should work more closely together, if not merging perhaps sponsoring some joint committees to work on special projects. Part of the present tension between the two organizations is personal. John Fisher at the MLA, and James Squire at the NCTE, are both strong, able, and ambitious men, and to some extent the organizations have become imprinted with their personalities. There is cooperation, but it is wary, each keeping an eye on what the other may be about to do. Every now and then one does something which is taken as an encroachment on the territory of the other: for example Fisher tried to get the ~~distribution of~~ teaching materials from the various curriculum study centers into the hands of the MLA, not only for distribution but also for editing; Squire regarded this as a power play; Squire started the Commission on Literature, and although Fisher sits on it he thinks it is none of the NCTE's business; Fisher has just raised the MLA dues in order to finance a study of the ideal qualifications of teachers of English and develop guidelines for their training, Squire thinks this a proper function of NCTE. These things are not to be taken too seriously, since Fisher/always get reconciled /and with one another - sometimes with Kitzhaber's help - and both Squire put the welfare of the profession above organizational allegiance.

PC asked whether his impression that the constituency of the MLA was largely among college teachers of literature and that of the NCTE largely among school teachers of language was a correct one. AK said that it was fair enough as a view from a distance, but did not hold up on a closer look. The

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organ of the NCTE, College English, is concerned with teaching at least through the undergraduate years and sometimes beyond; the difference between it and the MLA is that its emphasis is on teaching rather than on literary scholarship.

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AK's feeling is that an enterprise like the Commission on Literature should be jointly sponsored by the MLA and the NCTE if it is to be really effective. He said he would be prepared to communicate this point of view to the board of the NCTE if it would improve the chances of CC support for the project, although it would require some delicacy of handling.

On another matter, AK referred to some recent conversations with Boris Ford of the University of Sussex, who is head of the National Association of Teachers of English in England, which has a membership of 2000 English teachers of English. In the United States the whole field of the teaching of English is at the moment fumbling; the curriculum study centers don't really know quite what they're up to, the relationship between the teaching of English and the teaching of literacy is by no means clear, the influence on literacy of psychological, sociological, and anthropological elements is obscure, etc. The more AK thinks about it the more necessary he thinks it is for American representatives of the professional teaching of English to meet with their Canadian and British counterparts, and perhaps even with representatives from Africa and other parts of the Commonwealth. The field is too important and the time too crucial to permit the profession the luxury of ignoring what is going on in other parts of the world. Although many aspects of English teaching are now receiving Office of Education support - although this is not always given wisely - the OE cannot involve itself with international affairs, and AK would like eventually to approach CC with a view to sponsoring some kind of exchange of information and ideas. PC said he thought this was an important element of the whole picture, and that if CC decided to move in this area it might make a very plausible part of the program.

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