

NEWS AND COMMENTS

TEXTBOOK HEARING IN CALIFORNIA

In May 1975, the citizens of California and the State Board of Education faced another round in the controversy over the teaching of creation in the public schools.

On May 8 a public hearing was held in Sacramento, at which time interested parties could present their opinions on some of the textbooks that were being proposed for use in the public schools for 1976 to 1981. Most of the 67 speakers, in their allotted 5 minutes, addressed their remarks to one of two issues: the treatment of minorities or the teaching of creation.

After the public hearing in November 1972, the State Board had voted not to include creation in the science textbooks, but to discuss the creation and evolution theories in the social science texts. A perusal of the social science texts chosen for adoption by the Curriculum Commission made it evident that they had chosen to ignore the Board's decision and had not approved any books which included both creation and evolution.

Dr. John R. Ford, President of the State Board of Education, opened the hearing by reporting a record number of petition signatures and letters urging the inclusion of creation material — “the greatest number I have ever received on any measure.” He continued by stating, “I think it's fair to say that to date the members of this Board have received a total of about two hundred thousand letters, telegrams, cards, signatures, or other indications of public opinion about the teaching of evolution and creation.”

Concluding that the Board had a mandate in this regard because of the expressions of opinion, Dr. Ford urged: “According to the framework we have adopted, the various views of human origins must be seen as part of the total intellectual culture. The publishers have blatantly omitted any presentation of both sides as we requested them. None of the books up for adoption contain creationist materials.... We have Curriculum Commission members who do not follow the Board's directions. They are acting as independent agents. We must follow the framework.”

In the public hearing that occupied the remainder of the day, 16 of the speakers addressed themselves to the creation issue. The tone of this hearing was in sharp contrast to the 1972 hearing (see *Origins* 1:29-34). At that time the press lined the side of the room with cameras as about half of the speakers urged the teaching of both creation and evolution, and the other half argued that only evolution should be taught. In the 1975 hearing, the press was not very conspicuous, and the anti-creationists did not bother to come. Of the 16 speakers who spoke directly to the issue of

creation and evolution, all were in favor of including creation in the textbooks.

In spite of the petitions, letters, and speeches, the Board did not vote to include any creation material in the list of accepted books. The vote was 5 to 5, one vote short of the majority needed to pass any motion. Three of those who voted against creation teaching were recently appointed by Governor Edmund G. Brown, Jr.

Some creationist groups are now threatening court action or other legal means of pursuing the issue. Dr. Ford indicated privately that one problem is the lack of quality material on creation that would be acceptable for public schools. Another problem is less obvious to the casual observer. At the time of the Scopes Trial (1925) the evolutionists were contending that academic freedom demanded that evolution should be taught. Now that the tables are turned and the people of California want both creation and evolution to be taught, evolutionists are fighting this. Perhaps academic freedom is not the real issue in their minds, and one wonders if there isn't a concerted effort to eliminate a competing theory. The outcome of this session also makes one wonder about the usefulness of public hearings, since it appears that several of the members of the State Board of Education chose to ignore the desires of their constituents who support the public schools. A survey in the largest elementary school district in California (see *Origins* 2:42-43) indicates that a vast majority of the citizens of California want both creation and evolution taught. This survey also suggests that more people in California believe in creation than in evolution.

Leonard Brand