



## PROFILES IN COURAGE

Teacher's Guide

# RICHARD T. ELY

### CREDITS:

Starring Dan O'Herlihy, Marsha Hunt, Ed Asner, Ford Rainey, Leonard Nimoy, Karl Swenson, and Russell Horton. Written by Walter Bernstein. Directed by Michael O'Herlihy. Produced by Gordon Oliver and Robert Saudek Associates. Inspired by John F. Kennedy's Pulitzer Prize-winning book. **50 minutes.** Guide prepared by Robert D. Barnes for Social Studies School Service, 1983.

### OBJECTIVES:

- To understand the meaning of academic freedom.
- To explore the role of education in a democratic society.
- To examine the concepts of radicalism and patriotism.
- To understand the meaning of moral courage.

### BACKGROUND AND SYNOPSIS:

In the last quarter of the 19th century, the field of economics was revolutionized by new ideas on labor and social reform. One of the leading voices in the reform movement belonged to Richard T. Ely, a lecturer for the famous Chautauqua Institute. The institute became a forum "to promote ideas for human betterment," and attracted such nationally eminent men and women as William James, Jane Addams, and William Jennings Bryan. Ely was also the author of economic texts and head of the Department of Economics at the University of Wisconsin.

In July, 1894, while lecturing at the institute's summer session at Lake Chautauqua, New York, Ely discovered that he had become the object of a vicious, public attack. Using a "letter to the editor" of *The Nation* as his forum, Oliver E. Wells, Superintendent of Public Instruction for the State of Wisconsin, charged:

"Professor Ely believes in strikes and boycotts, justifying and encouraging the one, while practicing the other."

On the subject of Ely's books, Wells further charged that:

"Only the careful student will discover their Utopian, impractical, and pernicious doctrines."

1894 must rank even today as a year of major labor unrest and violence in America. In April, 125,000 coal miners went on strike. On May 1, "Coxey's Army" of unemployed descended on Washington, D.C. Nine days later, the famous Pullman Railway strike began: a strike that would spread to 27 states and 260,000 railway workers. *The New York Times* of June 29th called the Pullman strike "the greatest battle between labor and capital that has ever been inaugurated in the United States."

In this climate of unrest, Wells viewed anarchy and socialism as evil doctrines being disseminated by radical professors to "unformed minds" in America's tax-supported, public institutions. Wells set out to do a "weeding job on the radical element."

Wells had picked the wrong man to attack. A moderate, Ely rejected both violence as a labor solution and indoctrination as a classroom technique. Frustrated but composed, Ely welcomed the public hearing scheduled by the Regents, calmed his angry students, and buttressed his sagging colleagues, some of whom had suggested a quiet resignation rather than subject the University to an ordeal. At the hearing, the charges against Ely were proven to be totally unfounded. More important, the statement explaining the Regent's decision became America's "Magna Carta" of academic freedom.

### THE REGENTS STATEMENT 1894:

"As Regents of the University, we could not for a moment think of recommending the dismissal or even the criticism of a teacher, even if some of his opinions should in some quarters be regarded as visionary. Such a course would be equivalent to say-

ing that no professor should teach anything which is not accepted by everybody as true. We cannot believe that knowledge has reached its final goal, or that the present condition of society is perfect. In all lines of academic investigation, therefore, it is of the utmost importance that the investigator should be absolutely free to follow the indications of the truth wherever they may lead. Whatever may be the limitations which trammel inquiry elsewhere, we believe the great State University of Wisconsin should ever encourage that continual and fearless sifting and winnowing by which alone the truth can be found."

#### VOCABULARY:

The following words and phrases appear in the program. Teachers may wish to check for student understanding:

socialism	regents
depression	out of context
academic freedom	bias
anarchy	trade union
strike	testimonial
boycott	heretic
utopian	bigot
pernicious	social solidarity
radical	visionary
tainted	trammel
the long view	sifting and winnowing
consensus	Magna Carta
Darwin's theories	

#### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Ely told his students: "You have to make up your minds... It is my job to see that you examine all sides of a question."

Do you agree with Ely's philosophy? How appropriate would this attitude be for a junior or senior high school teacher? Why?

2. In the late 1800's, labor laws protecting women and children; health, educational, and welfare benefits for workers; and the concepts of minimum wage and an eight-hour day were considered by many to be "radical" ideas. Can you think of any proposals that today are controversial, but one day may be accepted by all? Defend your answer.

3. "If he doesn't like it here why doesn't he get out. We've got too many like him here already." Do you ever hear people talking like this? How might you respond to them in a constructive way?
4. After Wells made his public charges against Ely, some of Ely's colleagues were aloof toward their friend. Might there be several reasons for this behavior?
5. At the conclusion of his hearing, Ely remarked: "...the judges will finally decide which is really the man. Is he the heretic or is he the patriot? You see, I happen to be both."

What did Ely mean? Would this be a positive philosophy for a teacher? A student? Why?

#### ACTIVITY:

Hold a class discussion where the phrase "out of context" is explained and examples are given. Then write your own passage which if partially quoted will state the opposite of its intended meaning.

#### FOR RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION:

1. Ely was insistent that his students not demonstrate on his behalf even when they pointed out that it was their battle too. One of his concerns was that they might put their education in jeopardy.

Your school probably has a handbook outlining student rights. Your state has an education code. Obtain these documents and examine your rights and limitations. Do you have as much freedom as you thought you did or more? Explain.

2. Academic freedom involves more than the rights to speech and inquiry. In the past 20 years state and federal courts have ruled on issues of dress, hair, prayer, flag salute, student publications, locker searches, etc.

Conduct research on one or more of these academic freedom issues. Report to your class or plan a debate.