Controversial BioTexts Approved

By SUSAN BRIDGES

As reported in The Morning Star.

Despite vehement protests by fundamentalist church groups, the state textbook committee last week recommended for use in Texas public schools three biology textbooks which include the teaching of Darwin's theory of evolution.

The five biology books recommended by the committee will be reviewed by Texas Education Commissioner J. W. Edgar and the State Board of Education before being finally decided upon by local school boards. Edgar may veto no more than three of the five recommended texts.

In a hearing reminiscent of the 1925 Scopes Monkey Trial, the fifteen member committee heard arguments condemning the books as "completely materialistic and completely atheistic."

"Vicious Attack" Editor E. G. Lemmons of The Firm Foundation, a Church of Christ newspaper published in Austin, denounced the books as "the most vicious attack we have ever seen on the Christian religion."

The texts in question were produced through a joint effort of the National Science Foundation and the American Institute of Biological Scientists. According to Rice biologist Dr. Val Woodward the AIBS counts as members most of the practicing biological scientists in the nation.

The texts which drew the most fire, "Biological Science: Molecules to Man," "High School Biology," and "Biological Science: An Inquiry into Life," are part of the Biological Science Curriculum Study and were tested in classrooms and revised by teachers and scientists for five years before release for publication.

Evolution Important Robert Laing of Cypress Fairbanks, in an interview earlier this week, told the Times the problems presented by the books. Personally I feel that the theory of evolution is important. It should and will be taught in our schools. But I think that it is a denial of academic freedom to present the theory and not to present any other point of view."

Mr. Laing denounced the books as "dogmatic" and deplored the "use of taxpayers' money for the benefit of private publishers." The five texts were published for NSF by Rand McNally, Houghton, Mifflin, and Harcourt, Brace and World. "My main complaint," asserted Mr. Laing, "is that evolution is only a theory, one of many theories, but in the BSCS series is presented as a fact."

Dr. Woodward strongly objected to this assertion: "It is a fallacy!" He explained that he had examined the texts and they present the theory of evolution as a theory only. Woodward readily admits that the theory of evolution isn't a fact. A theory can't be a fact anymore than an apple can be an orange. It is a generalization which accounts for the facts rather than any other explanation yet presented.

Woodward further explained that "Evolution can never be taught as a fact except by individual teachers who themselves do not understand the difference between fact and theory. If everyone understood the nature of scientific theory, the relationship between theory and fact, the role of suspended judgment, there would be no problem."

Opposing Testimony Among those who either do not understand this position or disagree with it are university lawyers, and college professors. Testifying in opposition to the textbooks were the President of Hardin College in Searcy, Arkansas, a biology professor from Pepperdine College in Los Angeles, and Dr. Thomas Barnes, a physics professor from Texas Western University.

Physicist Barnes is a leading member of the Creation Research Society which disputes the Darwinian theory of evolution and asserts that world came into existence by an act of God during "Creation Week."

Over 1500 letters have been written concerning the disputed books from publishers' representatives who testified that evolution is presented just as a theory and it is not claimed as a fact. One representative explained that his book "shows how God chose to put us here, rather than teaching evolution."

This view is supported by a study made by the Committee on Christian Social Relations of the Episcopal Diocese of Texas. They found upon examining the disputed books that the manner in which evolution is presented in no way raises any theological questions. The textbook say nothing about the ultimate source of life or about God, and therefore the committee contends that any problems they raise concerning evolution is one for biologists and not for theologians.

Controversy Continues But the controversy has not ended with the recommendation made by the State Text Book Committee. The Cypress Fairbanks group has requested time before the State Board of Education to present their case on November 8.

According to Mr. Laing they hope to eliminate the BSCS series from consideration. Even though the other two recommended texts both consider Darwinian evolution, in Mr. Laing's words, 'they are not as dogmatic and were not published at taxpayers' expenses.'

"Last week's decision was in favor of the texts despite the fact that the majority of testimony was in opposition," added Mr. Laing. "We hope for a favorable decision next month."

Controversy Over Texts Approved

P.U. Meets Tonight

The Rice Political Union will convene tonight at 7:30 in the Fondren Library Lecture Room to discuss the presidential campaign. The divided-house format will allow most speakers to speak for two minutes following two five-minute opening hannahs. The meeting will be ended with a vote in the house on the presidential candidates.