Free Speech and the War

The issue of free speech has been sharply raised in Columbia University. Professors Dana and Cattell were dismissed for opposition to the war. Professor Charles A. Beard has always given an unqualified support to the war. But he has resigned from the faculty because, as a contemporary says, "he stands upon his right to support the war policy of his country as a free man, not as one whose livelihood depends upon acceptance of that policy."

John Dewey, Professor of Philosophy, and an eminent psychologist, has resigned from the committee which investigated the charges against Dana and Cattell because he did not approve of President Butler's action in dismissing Dana without waiting for the report of the committee.

As a result of these incidents, the Faculty

Council of Columbia has voted unanimously for a permanent Committee of Reference, with the President of the University as chairman and six of the faculty as members, to which may be submitted any questions of discipline that might involve the separation of a teacher from the University.

War imposes certain limitations on freedom of speech, and it is quite natural that there should be some nervousness and sensitiveness as to any utterance which may appear to weaken the nation. But it is easy to go to extremes; and there have been instances of suppression, or attempted suppression, of fair and reasonable discussion of the possible terms of peace. It would, of course, be wrong and absolutely out of accord with democracy to say that nobody may discuss this question except President Wilson and his colleagues.

The aims of this war, so far as the allies are concerned, must never be obscured. They are fighting for freedom and democracy against Prussian tyranny. They must never be tempted to borrow Prussian methods, or the battle won in France may be lost at home. There are, of course, utterances which are really treasonable and mischievous, and these must be sternly dealt with. But sedition hunting may be carried as far as heresy hunting in religion, and with like evil results.