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The Peril of Our Public Schools and the Way Out

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Morgan

The benefits of education and of useful knowledge, generally diffused through a community, are essential to the preservation of a free government.

Sam Houston.

Cultivated mind is the guardian genius of democracy. . . . It is the only dictator that freemen acknowledge and the only security that freemen desire.

Mirabeau B. Lamar.

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The Peril of Our Public Schools and the Way Out

Teacher Shortage Disastrous

The civilization of Texas is facing a more subtle and serious danger today than when the Kaiser launched his legions upon a war of world conquest. Reports gathered during August from the superintendents of 21 typical Texas cities and towns and from a number of counties showed the following:

1. That practically one-third of the men and one-fourth of the women teachers had left their positions in the public schools during the past year;

2. That four-fifths of those leaving were among the better teachers;

3. That there were this year only one-third the usual number of women and one-fifth the usual number of men applicants for vacant positions.

4. That several thousand teachers below even our former lowest standard had to be put into schools in order to fill vacancies, and that even then over a thousand schools would be unable to open this fall for want of teachers. For example, Tarrant County lacked one hundred teachers at that time, Comanche sixty, and Erath forty.

A study made during October by the National Education Association showed the same conditions still present.

100,000 Children Without Teachers

A more complete study made during November by Miss Blanton showed that conditions were growing worse, that over two thousand teachers' positions were still unfilled—those schools being closed and about one hundred thousand children roaming the roads and streets in idleness, with no visible hope of securing a teacher. Miss Blanton's study also indicates that, in addition to closing over two thousand schools, trustees have been compelled to put in about four thousand teachers utterly unprepared to teach—mere chil-

dren themselves, often with not even a high-school education.

In short, we have lost one-third of our best teachers already and by next fall will have lost over one-half, and we have no hope of finding worthy new ones to fill the vacancies. The numbers being prepared in normal schools and colleges for teachers have fallen off thirty per cent in America during the past four years.

Cause—The 49c Dollar

The cause is plain. The cost of living has increased over a hundred per cent while teachers' salaries have increased only twenty-five per cent. The average salary of the rural school teachers of Texas last year was \$436, and the average for the city teachers only about a hundred dollars more. The average salary for hod-carriers was \$1220, for blacksmiths \$1700, bricklayers \$1890, and machinists \$1950. I maintain that we ought to pay teachers at least as much as we pay hod-carriers! If we don't pay them that much, we shall lose speedily from our schools all those who are really fit to teach. I can't believe that the people of Texas will permit such a tragedy.

MUST HAVE \$10,000,000

To save our schools and our children, Texas must at once double the salary budget of her teachers. To do that she must raise about ten million dollars. Can it be done? Yes, easily, if we really want to do it and try to do it. We raised one hundred times that much in one year for the war, in the midst of terrible drouths and with over two hundred thousand of our able-bodied men drafted into the war besides.

State Teeming With Wealth

Now, the banks in the state have more deposits than ever before; the Federal Bank in Dallas is obliged to put on three times the regular force of clerks and work twenty-four

hours a day to keep up with the piles of money sent in to pay off old mortgages and notes; a hundred and twenty million dollars worth of crude oil alone has poured up out of the ground this year in Texas; lumber, cotton, and other farm products are bringing about four times their former prices. The state never had so much money before or spent half so much on luxuries. The State Tax Commissioner asserts publicly, without contradiction, that only one-third of the wealth of the state is yet rendered for taxation at all, and that that third is rendered on the average at only one-fourth its value.

Sources of Revenue Available

I am not an expert on taxation, but even I can show a half dozen ways to raise this ten million dollars for our schools, any and all of which are constitutional and just, and bear only upon those who are able to pay easily.

1. A state equalization and full rendition law with some teeth in it. This hits tax dodgers—civic slackers—only. It helps those who are now paying taxes fairly.

2. A small additional tax on that one hundred and twenty million dollars worth of crude oil, eighty per cent of which is owned by prosperous million-dollar corporations.

3. A small tax on the refineries that turn most of this one hundred and twenty million dollars worth of crude oil at slight expense into from three hundred to five hundred million dollars worth of gasoline, kerosene, lubricating oil, etc.; on the packeries, the lumber companies, the lignite, sulphur, and other corporations doing several hundred millions of dollars worth of business annually in our state. Neither the refineries nor the other corporations mentioned pay any business tax at all in Texas at present. Such taxes are just and are collected in most progressive states and nations.

4. There are 330,000 automobiles in Texas, probably a hundred thousand of which are expensive pleasure cars, pure luxuries, owned by those who are able, and who should be willing to pay a small tax for the education of the children of their state.

5. There are over 500 estates in Texas valued at more than a million dollars each, probably over two thousand valued at over five hundred thousand, and ten or twenty thousand worth over one hundred thousand each. A moderate graduated inheritance tax could raise the entire ten million a year for our schools without touching an estate worth less than a hundred thousand dollars and without retarding enterprise or doing anyone an injustice.

There are other and possibly better ways in which the needed money can be legally raised. The above are specified merely to show that there is plenty of sources from which to raise lawfully and justly money enough to educate the children of Texas, if we will just determine to raise it.

Enough Votes to Do It

There are about ten thousand mothers' club members, more than thirty thousand federated club members, more than twenty-nine thousand teachers, and more than five hundred thousand mothers and fathers of children in the public schools, children who have no other chance of an education if these schools fail. All these men and women have votes and can get from their legislators any reasonable thing that they determine to have.

THE REMEDY

Let every mothers' club and every federated club discuss this matter at once and express itself and send a demand to the Governor and to its representatives that the Legislature be assembled and our schools be supported adequately. Ask the Governor, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, and the heads of our institutions of higher learning in the meantime to call a state mass meeting and appoint a patriotic committee to work out at once a definite plan to present to the Legislature. Then, when the Legislature is assembled, write your representative and send his friends to Austin, if necessary, to help him fight the opposition of those interests that put money above children. Let

every school hold a rally at once and put the situation before the parents and have them inform the Governor and their representatives that they want their schools supported, and supported adequately, right now before they are ruined.

Special Session Necessary

We called a special session of our Legislature once to stop a prize fight. Surely our schools are infinitely more important. Let every friend of education, every citizen who loves Texas, every patriot who wants to keep faith with those boys who died that the world might be made safe for democracy join actively in this demand for action, and there will be action. If we sit still and let our schools go to pieces for want of funds in a state that is teeming with wealth and luxury, we shall show that we are not fit to live in a democracy but need a Kaiser to tell us what to do and to make us do it.

A. CASWELL ELLIS.

AUSTIN, TEXAS,
December 15, 1919.

Austin, Texas, December 15, 1919.

To All Friends of Education in Texas:

After listening to the facts in the foregoing speech, the state conventions of both the Texas Congress of Mothers and the Texas Federation of Women's Clubs voted unanimously to request each local club of these two organizations to hold a meeting at once for the discussion of the school situation, with the purpose of passing resolutions urging the Governor, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, President Vinson, and the heads of all our state institutions of higher learning to arrange a great state mass meeting at which the whole situation should be considered and committees appointed to work out a definite program of action, legislative and otherwise, for the protection and upbuilding of our public schools.

The State Teachers' Association took similar action, ask-



ing the teachers to call a mass meeting in each public school for the same purpose as was suggested for the local clubs.

There may be decided differences of opinion as to the specific method of attaining the results which are so urgently needed, and perhaps the greatest service which has been rendered by Professor Ellis is that he has a concrete suggestion to make. The mass meetings called for are not committed beforehand to any specific method of handling this difficulty, but out of them will undoubtedly come valuable suggestions which the school officials of the state can make use of in determining the sort of relief which can now be given.

Each club and school should hold such meeting promptly, pass the desired resolution, put this resolution and a brief statement of the facts in the local papers, and send copies to the Governor, to its representatives and senator, and to the educational officers suggested.

We see no hope of avoiding further serious injury to our schools, except through prompt and courageous action of the mothers, fathers, and friends of education in the state. If each will act promptly and vigorously, and will continue to act till relief is provided, this serious crisis may prove to be the fortunate beginning of a new era in the educational development of Texas.

Your political and educational officers can accomplish nothing without the cordial support of the mass of our people. The people must act and show their officers that they desire and will have good schools for their children.

ANNIE WEBB BLANTON,
State Superintendent of Public Instruction.

FLORENCE FLOORE,
President of the State Federation of Women's Clubs.

MRS. E. A. WATTERS,
President of the Texas Congress of Mothers.

ROBERT E. VINSON,
President of the Texas State Teachers' Association.

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