

SCHOOLS ARE THE PROBLEM OF EVERY CITIZEN

Now that the public schools of North Carolina have started again, it is the problem of every citizen to see that our children can get the best education possible. The safest, best and perhaps the only wise legacy we can leave our children, is the future of their schools. So it is the obligation of us all to take the long look forward, and fall into stride with the late Governor Aycock (1901-05): "I would have all our people believe in their power to accomplish as much as can be done anywhere on earth by any people."

The importance of education as the foundation of democratic liberties, and as the ramparts of freedom, is generally recognized. So it becomes the responsibility of every one to see that the citizens of tomorrow are thoroughly prepared to carry on in the great American tradition.

Our forefathers were interested in more than the daily routine of life. They realized that the country's future depended on the wisdom and knowledge of all the people. As a result they turned to education as the one possible guarantee that our form of government might endure.

The public schools of North Carolina needs to review the program for the future which has been recommended for several years. It is to this future that the work of the State Education Commission and all of us should be dedicated. North Carolina excels in education in some respects, compared with other states, but is sadly lacking in others.

Our State has more children per family to educate than the national average, while our income is about half the national average. In a recent school year we spent 1.88 percent of our total income to current cost of public education, while the average of the nation was only 1.59 percent. During this same school year only 13 states devoted a larger portion of their income to education than did North Carolina.

But, there are at least five other states that bear as large or larger share of school costs out of state funds; there are other states that devote a larger proportion of state taxes to education; there are many other states that have a larger percentage of their population enrolled in schools; and there are five southern states that have increased school support since 1940 by a larger percentage than we have.

One great weakness in the organization and administration of our school system is the divided responsibility. Our state constitution states that the elected State Superintendent of Public Instruction shall be the executive head of the school system. The State Board of Education, appointed by the Governor, elects a Controller, who is by law the executive officer of the board for all matters of business management and fiscal affairs. The Board now has charge of both promotion and control of our school system. This system leads to confusion and misunderstanding, resulting in the fact that no one knows just exactly who is responsible.

North Carolina has a higher percentage of draftees rejected by Induction Centers because of mental (educational) deficiency than most other states. This fact was most pronounced during World War II, but it is also true today. During the last war North Carolina had less than 55 percent of the total registrants in the Armed Forces, while the national average was 66.2 percent. This is due to the absence of compulsory school attendance and to the shortage of qualified teachers. "As

long ago as the 1940 census," quoting the Raleigh News and Observer, "the enumerators turned up thousands more children living in North Carolina than were shown in reports of children attending schools. Yet the last Legislature when shown the facts about wholesale disregard for compulsory school attendance laws declined to appropriate even a small sum to provide for some State supervision of the State's compulsory attendance laws."

Our record is not an enviable one for a State with great military traditions. The embarrassing record of World War II should never be equaled again. Something more is needed for education than books and buildings. The best teachers and the finest schools will fail if the State fails to discharge its duty in requiring strict observance of our attendance laws.

Undoubtedly one of our most critical problems is that of providing enough qualified teachers for our schools. We need hundreds of teachers to take the place of those who are now teaching without proper training or who have married or retired.

How are we going to provide enough teachers? Many do not wish to teach because of low salaries. Other reasons include poor equipment and facilities, not enough retirement allowance, too many pupils in a class, lack of normal social life, bad working conditions, and unfair adult attitude. We must make teaching more attractive if we are to secure enough qualified teachers for our children.

What are good teachers worth? This has long been a controversial subject in the state. North Carolina citizens say that it should be between \$2400 to \$2500 for ten months of service. The national average is \$2886. The State Education Commission is well aware of the fact that we cannot get good teachers unless we pay them more. In 1948 they recommended at least \$2400 for ten months of service for beginning teachers and from \$3600 to \$3900 for those who have taught for twelve years or more. Yet, nothing has been done about this recommendation.

Ate the offerings of our school adequate? The majority of our high schools limit their program to the five academic fields—English, Mathematics, Social Studies, Science and Foreign Language. Approximately 1 out of 4 offer no Home Economics, and 1 out of 2 offer no health instructions. Agriculture is available in only 6 out of 10 schools, typewriting in 6 out of 10, and shorthand in 2 out of 10. Elementary book-keeping is available in only 15 percent of our schools, music in 10 percent, Industrial Art in 10 percent, and diversified occupations in 4 percent. Our schools should provide courses which meet the needs of our children.

Unless everyone of us joins the fight for more and better schools, amply staffed with well-trained and well-paid teachers who are filled with the American spirit and eager to impart that spirit to their young charges, we face the danger of losing all of the social gains which we have made and the personal freedom for which our forefathers fought.

Our job is to use our voices and our votes to compel government officials to give real, intelligent attention to the school problems which face us. We must insist on careful planning and spending of the tax dollars to insure the best school system. We must see to it that teachers are paid on a basis which is consistent with their professional stature and their responsibility to our children.