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BROOKS ON COUNTY GOVERNMENT

PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN PERIL

The State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Dr. E. C. Brooks, spoke to the Town and County Conference at the University the other day on County Government and County Affairs in North Carolina. What he said was amply reinforced by the State Auditor in his address the following day. Has not the time come for the self-respecting people of this state to take effective action in every county?

Dr. Brooks's address follows: The continued growth of our public school system depends upon efficient county government. It is a fact easily demonstrated that in those counties which have had the benefits of good, progressive government for several years the public school system, as a rule, is better organized and more efficiently administered than in counties poorly governed. The cause is not hard to discover.

The county is the unit of self-government. The relation of the state to it is one of supervision and assistance. The county is likewise the unit of educational administration and the relation of the state to the public school system is one of supervision and assistance. The board of county commissioners is the governing body of the county and to this body the public schools must likewise look for support. Therefore, since the unit of government and of educational administration are one and the same whatever affects general county government will also affect the public school system, and frequently defects in the latter are easily traceable to the same defects that run through the whole county government.

The counties are not able to govern themselves and promote the progress of the people without state supervision and assistance. However, the state through a failure to exercise proper supervision encourages carelessness and waste in the collection and expenditure of public funds. Such defects inevitably breed discontent and suspicion among the people. This is true whether this neglect relates to the administration of justice, the building of roads, the development of our natural resources, or the education of the youth.

Studying County Affairs

It is my purpose to specify wherein county government is defective and suggest certain remedies.

The State Department of Education has made a study of county government in several counties with special reference to collecting and expanding public funds. We were led to this study by observing certain facts while administering the state public school fund for the year 1919-20.

One county reported that all but 2 percent of the gross amount of the taxes were collected. It was easy to see that the law was observed strictly in the expenditure of the funds. This county is well governed. Another county not many miles away showed a loss of about 15 percent and it was difficult to tell whether the public schools had to their credit a surplus or a deficit. However, it was certain that this county was each year running behind, and many of its accounts were unpaid. If these two counties receive support from the state according to their apparent needs, the county that is least efficient in government would be benefited most from state support.

You will please keep in mind that this study was made not at the close of the school year 1920-21, but at the close of the year 1919-20, the most prosperous year in our history, and a year in which it was comparatively easy to collect taxes.

We examined the records of a number of counties for the purpose of discovering the cause of this difference in the number of delinquent tax payers. While making this study we discovered defects, almost wholly the result of ignorance and carelessness, that ought to be corrected. Therefore, what I shall report here is not said in a spirit of general criticism and fault finding, but for the purpose of calling the attention of patriotic citizens to glaring defects that can be corrected in every county, and must be corrected if we expect to secure the greatest benefits from the

expenditure of large and still larger sums for public improvement, and hold the confidence and support of the people in the progressive program that is now remaking the state. These defects are—

Indicted On Six Counts

1. The county officials in many counties do not know the cost of county government. They do not know the size of the bonded indebtedness nor the cost of the several departments. As a result, they do not know what tax rates to levy to meet the full legitimate expenses of the county. As a rule, they are pledged to keep taxes down. Therefore, the authorities try to curtail expenses without really knowing the financial condition of the county or how to economize.

2. The number of delinquent taxpayers in many counties is entirely too large. The leakage here is great, and it is almost entirely attributable to poor government. As a result, it becomes necessary for the officials to increase the tax rates in order to provide for a shortage that is partly inexcusable. Good government in this respect would result in a saving of public funds, and at the same time it would increase the rate of progress.

3. The fines imposed by magistrates and the fines, forfeitures, and penalties of the towns and counties are not always properly accounted for and applied in accordance with law.

4. The funds collected are not segregated in accordance with law. Some departments, as a result, run far short of their legitimate needs, while others receive more than their share of the funds. Therefore, it becomes necessary to borrow for some departments because of extravagance or liberal expenditures in other departments. Such unbusiness-like methods will cause an increase in the bonded indebtedness or the taxes for the succeeding year must be raised to meet the deficit.

5. The special local taxes in many counties are not properly levied, collected, and disbursed. The people have a fine enthusiasm for voting local taxes for the improvement of roads and schools. This enthusiasm should not be destroyed because of carelessness and inefficiency in handling local funds. In some counties it was impossible for us to find any record of the local taxes levied, the amount of money collected, and how it was expended. Moreover, we have positive evidence that some of the larger taxpayers escaped this tax altogether. For example: in one local tax district the Postal Telegraph company, the Pullman Car company, the American Telephone company, the Southern Bell Telephone company, and the Western Union Telegraph company, all were entitled to pay taxes but neither had paid a cent of taxes in some years. They were not even on the tax books. This, of course, was pure carelessness. But the rate of taxes had to be increased because of this carelessness.

6. Finally it is very evident that in most counties there is not enough unity of management to fix responsibility and insure efficiency. In certain counties the officials begged us to show them how to organize the business so that the people's money might be safeguarded. This is an example of ignorance pathetically calling for expert state supervision.

In pointing out these defects we are not giving many people of the state anything new or sensational. The number of letters received and the newspaper comments since I first called attention publicly to them are sufficient evidence that these defects have been known for some time by numbers of people in counties where they exist. Therefore, we should be seriously considering effective remedies and should act vigorously and promptly.

Three Needed Reforms

1. The first step to take, it seems to me, is to arouse the public conscience through a publicity that will cause the people to demand better government. What do you suppose would be the effect on the people of many counties if the exact condition of the business were published in detail in this week's papers and published in terms that the people

A TRINITY OF FORCES

Dr. Walter N. Johnson

I am convinced that the great trinity of dynamic forces in our Western civilization is Christianity, Education, Industry, including exchange as well as production of commodities. They answer to soul, intellect, and body.

The sad fact is we have been trying to operate each of them apart from the other two. We have vaguely tried to give two of them a chance to work together, always being sure to leave out the third one. For instance Christianity and Education, at College, with Industry left out. Or Education and Industry, at College for example, with Christianity left out.

One combination gives helpless idealism; the other dark materialism. The world still waits to know what will happen when Christianity, Education, and Industry are all coupled up vitally together.

could understand? Perhaps it would be better not to go into details until the officials have had time to get their affairs straight. But they must be made straight or the people will become disgusted and cease to support the progressive measures that are now registering a new era in the state. The people should know who are excused from paying taxes and how every dollar of the money has been spent. The best government is now found in those counties whose accounts are well audited and published periodically. County auditors have given business-like methods to many counties and have saved the people thousands of dollars and created confidence in the business management.

2. In the second place state supervision should be sufficient to protect the public, and to unify county management so as to avoid the multiplication of independent officials. The state bank examiner closes a bank as soon as it reaches the danger line. County officials should be required to meet a similar standard of safety. A system of audits that will exhibit these defects should be uniform and made under some responsible head like the state auditor. Moreover, whenever it is made to appear that county officials are incompetent and are failing to meet a given standard of efficiency, they should be removed and temporary appointments should be made by some responsible county authority until the people have a chance again to elect their successors. New and inexperienced officials should be given a reasonable time in which to qualify for their duties and the state should give them all the help possible. But they should qualify. It is unfair to a sheriff, for example, for the commissioners to allow his books to run from year to year without a complete settlement, as is sometimes the case, and then, after he becomes hopelessly involved due to a failure to settle annually, his whole career is destroyed and his personal fortunes wrecked as a result. In one county a sheriff, owing to poor bookkeeping, overpaid his accounts by more than \$1,000 and he was wholly ignorant of the mistake until his attention was called to it. He had settled for the dog tax twice. The state owes it to the individual and to the public to see that both are protected from incompetent officials.

The Schools Indicted

3. Finally, our high schools, colleges, and university should give specific instruction in local self-government. They do teach the history and the forms of government, but students receive too little instruction in local self-government. There will be perhaps 40,000 pupils enrolled in the high schools and 15,000 enrolled in our higher institutions this year. These within a few years will be the state's leaders, and yet they receive too little instruction in the greatest lesson that an individual or a group of individuals ever learned—namely, how to govern properly.

What is good government among students, and how can they be taught to govern themselves properly? How can they be led to detect weakness and defects in the government they live under?

What is a well governed town or county and where can it be found? Is the county or city government in which the institution is located well governed? What are its defects? Are the public funds safeguarded and wisely spent? If our colleges and university would give special attention to local government and 15,000 students were taught annually to know what is good county or city government they would be, within a few years, the strongest factors in preserving local self-government and in checking the drift toward centralization of power in the state and the nation.

The very first word in education should be government—self-government, respect for law and order, and how to cooperate in producing a self-governing people. We have groups of people organizing into quasi governmental bodies—manufacturers, commercial institutions, laborers, farmers, professional men and women. This tendency to organize for local self-government is a natural social instinct. But the inclination of some is to elevate the rule of their organization above the law of the county or the state. This is perilously near sovietism. The county and the state should rise above all, and all should cooperate to this end. The spirit of democracy cannot thrive in any other way.—Greensboro Daily News.

WRITE TO THE COMMITTEE

A committee to promote improved county government in North Carolina was appointed by the Town and County Conference at the University the other day. This committee consists of Hon. B. A. Patton, President of the State Association of County Commissioners, Chairman, Asheville; W. C. Jones, county commissioner, High Point; Senator Lindsay C. Warren, Washington; Lionel Weil, merchant, Goldsboro; Henry R. Dwire, Editor Twin-City Sentinel, Winston-Salem; and E. C. Branson, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Secretary.

It is the business of this committee to ascertain the status of county government and county affairs in North Carolina, to receive and digest the opinions of the people of the state on this subject, to organize the information and the opinions secured, and to brief these up as a program of improved county government. This summary is to be prepared for the consideration of the State Association of County Commissioners. It will be presented to them by President Patton at the next meeting of this body, for discussion, necessary amendment, and adoption.

Meanwhile this committee will be counseling with Dr. H. W. Dodds, Chairman of the Committee on County Government of the National Municipal League.

It is proposed to make a state-wide appeal to the readers, thinkers, and leaders of North Carolina, to arouse public opinion for improved county government in this state, and to create the popular sentiment necessary to secure such legislative action as may be necessary.

This committee will be grateful for authoritative information about county affairs and for the opinions that anybody may have about better forms of county government in North Carolina.

Communications in regard to improved county government can be sent to E. C. Branson, Committee Secretary, Chapel Hill, or to any member of the committee.

STUDY COURSE FOR WOMEN

The University Extension Division has a new study course in citizenship for women's clubs, under the title Problems of Citizenship for Women. It has been prepared for those who want to become familiar with town, county, state, and national affairs.

The first two programs outline a study of the general service rendered to the citizen by the government and the part that women may play in government.

Following this introduction is a special study of town and city government, with emphasis on municipal so-

cial service, such as town and city planning, school grounds and school improvements, public health and recreation.

The next topic is a study of county government, its organization and finances, with special emphasis on county affairs.

The chapter on state government covers the greater part of the program, with emphasis on the social services rendered by the state, such as public health, sanitation, the State Board of Health, play and recreation, public welfare, and public education.

The twelfth meeting is given to a study of voting and the holding of elections, followed by a study of the aids to government, such as community organization, business clubs, and organizations influencing government.

Citizens who are not familiar with the machinery of our government will find this program a convenient study outline.

For further information address the University Extension Division, Chapel Hill, N. C.

EXTENSION SERVICE.

University Extension Service is the title of the first bulletin of a new series just begun by the University Extension Division called the University of North Carolina Extension Bulletin. It will be published twice a month in September, October, November, December, and once a month in January, February, March, April, May, and June. During the coming year it will deal with such subjects as: Pageantry, State-wide High School Debate, North Carolina Club Year-Book, Public Discussion, Recreation, Correspondence Courses, Extension Lecture Service, Play Production in High Schools, etc. If you wish to be placed on the mailing list to receive this new series of bulletins, send your name to the Extension Division, Chapel Hill, N. C.

The first bulletin, Vol. 1, No. 1, University Extension Service, is illustrated with pictures, diagrams, and maps, and presents in detail, the various kinds of service offered by the following bureaus of the University Extension Division: Correspondence and Class Instruction, Lectures, Short Courses and Institutes, Public Discussion, Community Drama, Commercial and Industrial Relations, Community Music, Municipal and County Information, Economic and Social Surveys, Community Development, High School Debating and Athletics, Design and Improvement of School Grounds, Educational Information and Assistance.

The University through its Extension Division desires to serve you. Write to the Division today for this new bulletin and throughout the year call upon its services.

COMMUNITY MUSIC

An Extension Leaflet, called Community Music Methods and Materials, by Paul John Weaver, professor of music in the University, has recently been sent out free to North Carolina people.

It is the purpose of this bulletin to offer helpful suggestions for the organization and initial development of music along community lines in localities where this phase of musical life has not previously been developed. Some of the subjects dealt with are as follows: The Community Sing; The Song-Leaders' Class; The Community Chorus, Orchestra, and Band; Community Music Festivals and Contests; School Music.

If you have not already received one of these pamphlets, write to the University Extension Division, Chapel Hill, N. C.

COMMUNITY COOPERATION

The Daniels community complying with a request to meet together Monday morning for the purpose of cleaning off the grave yard was surprised to find that the task was accomplished in two hours and a half. This was made possible by the community as a whole responding to the invitation and by each and all taking hold of the work in hand. It was as fine a body of workers as one would want to see. There were no loafers and no idlers. Men too old to take an active part in the use of the mattock, the shovel, the fork, favored the occasion with their presence and such service as they could render. Some of the good women also came in with a helping hand. Others whose business engagements called them to town were thoughtful enough to make generous contributions to the repair fund. It was a striking illustration of what a community can do when it has the community spirit, and when it is not afraid to use it.—Lincolnton News.