

Should Public High Schools be Closed for Lack of Funds?

By Pedro T. Orata

1. Latest Trend: Secondary Education for All

THE latest educational trend today is the effort being exerted in many countries to make secondary education universal. In the 1955 **International Yearbook of Education**, it is noted that the increase in enrollments in secondary schools (from 1953-54 to 1954-55) in some 70 countries, ranged from 3% to 32%, which is very much higher than the increase in primary school enrollment (5%), and higher than it was in the preceding year (8%). Scattered figures are as follows: Chile's secondary enrollments increased by 8,129 to a total of 103,865; Columbia's independent secondary schools increased by 79 to a total of 664; Egypt's enrollments increased by 16,387 to a total of 108,449; Ireland's increase averages 1,000 per annum, to a total of 55,000 in a population of 3,000,000; Japan's, by 9% in lower and 8% in upper secondary schools; etc.

Then, too, in many countries, there is increasing percentage of elementary school graduates continuing to the secondary level; for example, 65.7% of pupils completing their 7th year in Bulgaria enrolled in the 8th year; in the U.S.S.R., the corresponding figure is 76%, and in Byelorussia, it is 85%. In the United Kingdom, the effect of the Education Act of 1944, which makes school attendance up to the age of 15 years is unprecedented. The enrollment at the secondary level continues to rise by leaps and bounds, disregarding social distinctions, and by 1955, it reached 1,822,000 (compared with 4,554,000 in the primary). In the United States, of a total of 20,074,000 children of 7 to 13 years of age, 99.4% are enrolled in school. Furthermore, of the 1,672,920 students who enrolled in the 9th grade of the public high schools during 1947-48, 1,045,588 (62.5%) remained to graduate in 1951.

While, the goal of secondary education for all is still very far in the majority of countries, nevertheless the trend is for the "public high school enrollment becoming increasingly non-selective." In France, as I have once indicated, there is a pending legislation, known as the Biller's Bill, which requires amongst

others to raise the school-leaving age to 16 by 1964. In the Scandinavian countries, in Switzerland, in Belgium, there is a wholesome trend towards universalizing secondary education. The same may be said of Egypt, where in 1954-55 there were more than 470,000 pupils in the secondary schools, compared with less than 1.5 millions in the primary, a ratio of more than 1 to 3.

The reasons for this trend are not difficult to understand. First, the obliteration of class distinctions in most countries is resulting in all children of school age having equal opportunity for education (theoretically at first and gradually in actual fact as facilities are increased to meet the pressing demand of the masses).

But more than a matter of right on the part of the people and duty on the part of the government, in the second place, secondary education for all is a necessity from the economic, social, and political points of view. Education for mere literacy is outmoded, as it is now considered wasteful unless it is continued further; to enable the young people to acquire work and thinking habits which would enable them to become productive and creative citizens. The millions of dollars used to provide literacy in the elementary grades is half wasted because by the time the pupils are old enough to marry they will have forgotten much of what they learned in the elementary school, including in many cases the ability to read and write and to do simple arithmetic.

But this is not all. What can elementary graduates do to help on the farm to raise more crops, when they are still too young to use the plow or drive a tractor? What happens usually is that the millions of young people, for want of work to do, dissipate their time and efforts and become social and economic liabilities to their communities and homes. During the time of the so-called "reading centers" in the Philippines three or four years ago, the youth found a convenient place to go, to while away their useless time, but what did they do in the reading centers? Since there was nothing to read that was of much interest — and besides, the reading habit was not yet developed far enough anyway — the young people played dama, gossiped, or merely sat. In some cases they developed even worse habits, hence the teen-ager problem.

Imagine, on the other hand, the potentialities for good that could result from universal secondary education. As was pointed out in the open forums in the barrios and poblacion of Urdaneta, where an effort was made to encourage the parents of Grade VI pupils to send their children to high school — which

effort resulted in more than 25% increase in the first-year enrollment in the Urdaneta Community High School in 1957-58 as compared with the previous school year — the young people may be needed at home to help on the farm for only a few weeks during the year. So, except for those few weeks during the planting and harvest seasons, the young people stay home to sleep, play bingo, or become a social menace.

In many high schools in the United States, particularly in the rural areas, high school students engage in production of food, furniture, clothes, etc. on a commercial basis. With little capital, they go to work to produce things to sell, which would give them profit far above their expenses. Thus, they start earning while still learning. In Berlin, in an island in a river, there has been going on a very interesting experiment called education for communal living. Secondary school youth engage in all kinds of crafts — at first to learn and afterwards to earn their living and other expenses. In a school in Papua, in the Pacific, there is a school where the day is divided into two equal parts — one for classroom work and the other for practical-activities. Dr. Canto, principal of the Bayambang High School, saw the school in operation last year on a Unesco fellowship, where the students not only supported themselves but also paid the teachers' salaries from the income from their farm and poultry projects, where they raised pedigree crops and pigs and chickens. In this way, they combined the good features of a community school and an experimental farm — they earned their way through, they improved their homes and community, and they developed better varieties of coffee, pigs and chickens.

Increasingly, the world is becoming industrialized, the Philippines included, where according to the latest information more than 800 new industries have been established since the last war. To man these new industries requires more education than is provided in our six-year elementary schools. More mathematics and science are required than are taught in these schools. The fact is that there is now a tendency in the Philippines to require high school education as the minimum qualification for the job of school janitor or to join the Army.

Above all these considerations is the waste in manpower and in people as a result of failure to provide facilities for further education for the millions of elementary school graduates all over the world and in the Philippines, in particular. After the elementary, the boys and girls are at their height of ambition, energy and health. Consider the potentialities of one million young people between the ages of twelve and eighteen to twenty for good or for evil, if not used properly. At three hours a day of useful employment through work projects, there could

be 600,000,000 work hours in 200 school days a year; in four years, that could mean 2.5 billion work hours! What is the equivalent of that in bulldozers and tractors?

And, as shown in many public and a number of private high schools during the last twelve years, the students at those ages are willing to work to earn money doing any kind of job for pay including building toilets, draining pagbabasaans, and making or repairing furniture. It seems altogether unfair to these youth and unwise on the part of the government to fail to utilize this huge manpower for the economic and social development of the Philippines. It would be much better not only for the young people but also for the country as a whole to open the door of the secondary school wide open to all comers and, at the same time, to mobilize them for the much needed and talked about economic development of the country.

2. Closing Public High Schools Is Not Wise

This trend to make secondary education a universal institution to enable all youth between the ages of twelve and sixteen to twenty to continue their education beyond the elementary grades, most fortunately, has been going on in the Philippines especially since the last war when, in fact, the increase in enrollment in the high schools far exceeded that in the elementary grades. As I said, secondary schooling is more than a human right on the part of the young people, but a social, economic and political necessity for the nation and people as a whole. If wisely employed the potentialities for economic and social good that are inherent in our more than one million population of secondary school age could contribute immeasurably towards the development of our growing industries and the improvement of our standards of living which, as everybody knows, are still below the subsistence level especially in the rural communities.

I wish now to comment upon recent suggestions emanating from high and low places to close public high schools that cannot maintain high standards, especially the municipal high schools that have been established since 1945, of which there are close to 300, enrolling close to 200,000 students. The argument in favor of closing such schools is very simple. The tuition fees are too high for the families of the students to pay, and so, every year and increasingly so, enrollments go down and standards decline. And presto, so the argument goes: "Closing of such schools seems to be the only solution." (*Manila Daily Bulletin*, 20 June 1957)

Let's follow the argument a bit. In the *Bulletin* article, which is obviously a write-up of an interview with the Director of Public Schools, Dr. Benigno Al-dana, the reasoning is as follows:

Reports received from division superintendents of schools showed that practically all provincial and municipal high schools, with the exception of those in Rizal province, have been incurring yearly deficits. Sometimes, it was reported, a number of high school teachers were deprived of their vacation pay because the tuition fees were sufficient only to pay them for ten months. All efforts to get funds from the province and/or municipality failed, as did all representations with the Congress of the Philippines to put up the funds or to include financial aid to high schools in the annual school budget of ₱120,000,000. As a result, the standards of instruction have been declining, and in some cases, enrollments declined too. In the meanwhile, it has been suggested that the high schools be converted into vocational schools, but the change in name would not resolve the financial problem — it will only aggravate it. More money will be needed for equipment for such schools.

In view of these considerations, the Bureau of Public Schools was "contemplating closure of provincial and municipal high schools all over the country" rather than continue to maintain them with tuition fees alone. This is also the conclusion by a writer in the *Weekly Women's Magazine*, Mr. Neilo T. Altre, who presented a number of alternatives — government subsidy through a more effective school financing system, closing all public high schools that cannot meet standards, etc. ("The Crisis in the Public High Schools," 25 January 1957)

I feel, considering all the factors involved, that closing the public high schools that cannot meet the standards is not the solution, indeed if it can be said to be a solution at all. It is like arguing that the only solution to the problem of cancer is to kill all cancer patients, on the premise that there would be no problem if there were no cancer patients.

Right away, after the public high schools are closed, the students will go to private high schools, where they will pay more fees for much less education. Let us look at the facts. During the open forums in Urdaneta with parents in all the barrios and poblacion, it was shown by the testimony of the parents, themselves, who had some children in the

private high schools in the town, that while it might appear on the surface that the private schools charged as little or even less than the Urdaneta Community High School, because the initial tuition fee is as low or lower, in the end they charged very much more. In addition to the tuition fees, they charged other fees — matriculation, athletic, examination, diploma, and several others. The fact is that they charge about 25% more than the public high school.

But, this is not the only consideration. What about the quality of the courses offered in private high schools, most of which are purely academic to distinguish them from those in the general public high schools, which include from 25 to 40 per cent vocational courses?

Consider, furthermore, the student-teacher ratio, which is nearly twice as high in the private high schools as in the public high schools. Based on figures furnished by the Bureaus of Public and Private schools, the facts are as follows:

	Public High Schools (1952-53)	Private High Schools (1953-54)
Number of schools	353	1,228
Number of Teachers	8,014	8,248
Enrollment	216,875	365,702

So, for more than three and a half times as many schools and nearly twice as many students, the private high schools employed only as many teachers — just very slightly more as the public high schools with only half as many students. The only result is inferior instruction in the private high schools, which everybody knows. There are a few exceptions, to be sure, but generally speaking, for the reasons indicated, instruction in the private schools is inferior to that of the public high schools.

So, as I said, closing the public high schools will have only one effect: the students will go to the private high schools where they will pay more and get less education. Which is no solution at all. The only ones to benefit from it would be the private school owners who are in the business for profit.

(To be concluded in the next issue)

