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## ***PUBLIC SCHOOLS***

The most obstinate perennial problem of education in the Philippines today is the stabilization of the financial support of our public schools. For the solution of this problem, proposals are not wanting.

It is recalled that about ten years ago, as a result of a nationwide survey of our education system by a Joint Legislative Committee, that committee embodied in its report a number of proposals calculated to place the school system on a stable financial basis. Almost simultaneously a similar survey was undertaken by a UNESCO survey mission. The mission likewise found that the fundamental problem of education in the Philippines is how to stabilize the financial support of the system.

To implement its recommendations, the UNESCO mission sent to the Philippines Dr. Gayce Morrison, an outstanding American authority on school financing to work out a concrete proposal for the consideration of the authorities concerned: Dr. perintendent Fructuoso Yanson and Dr. Pedro Guiang, now assistant director of the Bureau of Public Schools, evolved a plan which is now known as the Foundation Program. The program was submitted to congress in the form of a bill was taken upon it consideration, but no action was taken upon it. When the Board of National Education was organized it up-dated the Foundation Program and re-submitted it to Congress for action, but no action on any of the foregoing proposals was taken.

In 1955 the late President Magsaysay, perturbed by the vexing perennial problem, created a special committee headed by the then Secretary

of Education, Justice Pastor Endencia of the Supreme Court. The report of the Committee, like all the others, seemed to have found its way into the files for record purposes. And recently, former Secretary Manuel Lim of the Department of Education submitted to Congress another proposal known as the Stabilization Bill, followed by another proposal by the incumbent Secretary, the Honorable Jose E. Romero. Both proposals did not reach first base.

In the last regular session of Congress it was expected that at long last the problem might be solved once and for all when H. B. No. 3616 sponsored by Congressman Manuel S. Enverga, chairman of the Committee on Education of the lower house, was calendared for discussion on the floor of the lower house. Unfortunately, however, Congress again followed its usual course of vacillation and inaction. It adjourned without taking any action on the bill.

There can hardly be any doubt that, when it comes to the problem of school financing, there is a perpetual motion but, unluckily, there is equally a perpetual inaction. For one reason or another, the authorities concerned shy away from the problem. They dare not grab "the bull by the horns," so to speak.

Largely because of the perennial vacillation and inaction of the powers that be, coupled with an apparent indifference of our people, we still have to bear the sight of the dismal and dismaying spectacle of thousands of boys and girls going to school without textbooks, seated for hours in make-shift benches and stools; of classes filled beyond capacity, huddled in buildings utterly unsuitable for school purposes; of schools bare

of equipment, tools, supplies, and other essential items of instruction; and worst of all, of an abbreviated, impoverished, and well nigh anemic curriculum because of the drastic cut in the period of schooling.

It is against formidable handicaps like these that our schools will have to struggle again in their desperate effort to give children that quality of education which they deserve and to which they are entitled, but which they do not receive chiefly because of the continuing indifference, vacillation, and inaction of the authorities concerned, and partly because of our being penny-wise and pound-foolish.

Because of this indifference, about 250,000 children of school age might not be admitted into our schools next year. However, it is quite reassuring to know that the Department of Education is doing its utmost to forestall the pathetic possibility of having to refuse admission to such a great number of children and that it is determined to make the best out of an almost hopeless situation by giving top priority to the Constitutional mandate for at least free public primary education even if it has to resort to such drastic measures as the following: (1) assignment of teachers where they can serve the biggest number of pupils; (2) pulling out teachers from intermediate classes where there is more than one teacher to one class and assigning teachers thus spared to the primary grades; and (3) requesting extension positions to be based solely on the need for their services. (*The Manila Chronicle*, June 7, 1966).

Of course, these measures are only temporary palliatives. They do not solve nor are they meant to solve the fundamental problem. As Secretary Romero warned, "Unless a law is ap-

proved next year to stabilize financing in the public schools, chaotic condition will prevail."

The Secretary has given his warning. A similar warning was sounded by former Senator Geronima T. Pecson, now chairman of the UNESCO National Commission of the Philippines, when, at the induction ceremonies of the new officers of the Philippine Medical Women's Association held recently, she said: "The indifference of the government towards the education of children is an injustice for which the nation will pay dearly . . . ."

Mrs. Pecson said further: "Ignorance never sired progress, much less democracy, justice, and liberty; and never will." And she stressed. "If we do not do our duty today of providing at least free and compulsory basic education for our young, we must abandon our every hope for peace and progress."

Like the proverbial "handwriting on the wall," these warnings cannot be ignored because what is at stake is not only the future of millions of our children but the future of our country.

By our continuing indifference to improve our system of education through the stabilization of its financial support, we are wrecking the basic foundation of democracy of which we are reputed to be the most ardent and zealous exponents in this part of the world. As Senator Padilla has aptly observed: "We cannot over-emphasize the need for education because the sound basis for real democracy is enlightened citizenry." And certainly we cannot ignore what that foremost leader of democracy and freedom in the world today, President

Eisenhower, once said: "Informed citizens are guardians and spirit of democracy."

The wisdom and validity of these observations can hardly be questioned. Like the warnings of Secretary Romero and Mrs. Pecson, they cannot be ignored if democracy in this country is to be real and lasting.

However, the failure of Congress to solve the financial problem of our public schools should not be a cause for despair. Rather, it should stimulate more vigorous and relentless efforts on our part to arouse, mobilize, and enlighten public opinion persistently and ceaselessly until the authorities concerned come to realize that vacillation and inaction is no longer the safest and most prudent course for them to follow.

It should be understood, moreover, that the solution of our present problem of stabilizing the support of our public schools is not the responsibility of Congress and our government leaders alone. In the last analysis, the people themselves are as much involved in the solution of the problem as our Congress and our leaders. Congress may do its part and pass the needed legislation for the solution of the problem, but if our people don't do their part, we should be satisfied with the mediocre quality of products that our schools are producing.

It is not enough to work for the passage of this or that measure in Congress. We must also be prepared to meet whatever obligations the measure may demand of us. We cannot over-stress the fact that our children will receive only the kind of education for which we are willing to pay, and not the kind of education which they deserve and should have.