

School Teachers in Bolivia

By **Benedicto Duran Ortiz**

Dear Colleague,

In your letter of 8 February you asked me to supply you with information about the training given to school teachers in Bolivia, their standard of living as compared with other members of the community and their activities inside and outside the school. I shall meet your request with pleasure, although I doubt whether it will be possible for me to keep strictly to the points covered by your question.

FOR the eighty-four years that followed the foundation of Bolivia in 1825, the technical and administrative organization of its schools constituted a problem its founders and their followers were practically unable to solve. Education statutes, acts, regulations and projects for the creation of various different kinds of educational establishments had resulted in failure after failure until the foundation, in 1909, in the city of Sucre, on the occasion of the Chuquisaca centenary celebrations, of the NATIONAL PROFESSORS AND TEACHERS TRAINING SCHOOL OF THE REPUBLIC, known today as the NATIONAL TEACHERS' TRAINING SCHOOL. From 1838 to 1909 the various attempts to establish a teachers' training school had failed due to the lack of a technically qualified and professionally reliable staff. In 1909 the Belgian pedagogic mission, presided over by Mr. Georges Rouma, established the Bolivian Teachers' Training School on a firm and lasting basis. To this institution are due many radical reforms in education, as well as the very structure of the present system, which covers pre-school (kindergarten), primary, secondary and professional training. 2500 school teachers trained in this school between June 1909 and October 1955 are now engaged in teaching in those different fields which over forty-seven years makes an average output of 53 school teachers per year.

The Teachers' Training School is at present divided into the following sections: EDUCATION FOR HOME LIFE, a section for the technical training of school mistresses in the sciences and arts of the home; MUSICAL EDUCATION for pre-school mistresses; PRIMARY EDUCATION for primary school teachers, and SECONDARY EDUCATION for teachers in the secondary and professional schools,

the latter being composed of 4-sub-sections. (Biology and Chemistry; Mathematics and Physics; Philosophy-Grammar and Literature-Grammar, History and Geography).

Each section has its own staff under the direction of a head of section, while professors of general subjects or educational sciences, who work in all the sections, have the role of coordinators. The director, aided by the heads of sections, and in exceptional cases by the Board of Professors, has sole responsibility for running the school. As you may see, the five sections make up in practice five different training schools. This system provides a unified teaching staff, with resulting unity of action.

The following conditions must be fulfilled by a candidate to the National Teachers' Training School:

a) Education for Home Life Section: a candidate must have passed her fourth year at a secondary school or concluded her studies at a professional school for girls.

b) Kindergarten and Music Sections: Owing to the urgent need throughout the country for Kindergarten mistresses, entrance will be granted for one more year to pupils who have passed their third year at a secondary school, provided they have an elementary knowledge of the piano or show some aptitude for music.

c) Primary Section: candidates must have passed their fourth year at a secondary school or have taken their baccalaureate. Those who have passed the latter are admitted into the third year course, provided they have also passed the entrance examination held by the Institute of Pedagogic Investigation. If in this examination their making falls below a certain standard, they begin in the first or second year course.

d) Secondary Section: candidates must have passed the baccalaureate and corresponding entrance examination.

Apart from the above conditions, each candidate must present the following documents: birth certificate, good health certificate, certificate of studies and good behaviour, certificate of good conduct (*vita et moribus*), vaccination certificate, and in the case of a scholarship, certificate of insufficient means. Pu-

pupils join the school from all parts of the Republic, and form lasting bonds of friendship and solidarity while attending it. The School has always been run on co-educational lines, a regime now gradually being extended to other education establishments throughout the country.

The preliminary selection and distribution into the different sections carried out by the Institute of Pedagogic Investigations is revised and adjusted yearly, to meet the actual requirements of pupils in each section, as they become apparent during the first year of study. These flexible arrangements, although resorted to only sparingly during the first few months, make it possible in due course to proceed to a final redistribution. Pupils who have chosen a particular section, are thus given time to form a truer estimate of their special aptitudes and capacity. After a little enlightening personal experience, the zeal and optimism of the early stages fall into proper perspective, and under the guidance of the Director and professors, many of the pupils manage to plan their future programs in a permanent and balanced way. The period of study in all sections is divided into two clearly distinct stages of training:

I. GENERAL CULTURE, of a greater or lesser duration and thoroughness according to the requirements and nature of each section, devoted to systematic revision and to completing and broadening the future school teachers' knowledge, so that he can acquire a sound, integrated, and practical culture. This stage is specially stressed in the Home Life Education, Music, Kindergarten and Primary Sections, although in the second year some of the specialized educational subjects are already introduced into the curriculum.

II. THE PROFESSIONAL STAGE, which is predominant both as to theory and practice in the last two years and particularly in the fourth year. Practical training is introduced by graduated stages. In the second year pupils begin to study the simpler aspects of administration, and to gain experience in looking after children, watching over them at play or at work and acting as prefects. In the third year they attend model classes given by their own teachers, by school-teachers from outside or by their companions. After each lesson they draft a report which is submitted, first to the teacher which class they attended, and then to their teacher of pedagogy. At this stage pre-teaching practical work begins. Third-year pupils must submit 12 valid periods of practical work before taking the general exams. Fourth year pupils spend one day a week of their lesson time at a primary, secondary or professional school, and two months before the end of their studies, they carry out a "professional initiation". For a week the candidate takes full charge of a class or one of the subjects of the class, sets objective tests, qualifies his

pupils and then presents himself for a final and very exacting practical examination. Failure to pass this examination entails the loss of one year of studies.

In the secondary section, specialized teaching and professional training are undertaken together, although in the third and fourth years particular importance is attached to pre-professional and professional initiation practice, which is continued in the two first years of actual teaching.

At the end of the fourth year of study, after passing the yearly and the final examinations, pupils receive a final certificate and may apply to the national authorities for the corresponding diploma, as soon as they have fulfilled the following requirements:

1. Primary, Kindergarten and education for home life teachers, after two years' exercise of their profession, must submit a certificate of efficiency endorsed by the Director of the school they have taught in. Teachers of education for home life are free to work in any type of school, but they usually start with primary teaching.

2. Music teachers must submit a thesis based on the practical work carried out at a primary school over two years. Although also authorized to work in any type of school, they too prefer to start with kindergarten or primary school work.

3. Secondary school teachers, after two years' teaching, must submit a thesis on subjects or problems connected with secondary education. This thesis is discussed, approved and qualified in accordance with provisions laid down on the subject.

On leaving the National Teachers' Training School or any other teachers' training school, such as the Rural Training Schools, all qualified pupils are entitled to the same basic salary as that paid to teachers who have already obtained their diploma. For the purposes of percentage increment (explained below) they are placed in the fourth category.

School teachers are appointed by the General Director of Education, subject to the appropriate ministerial approval. The teacher takes up residence in the place to which he has been appointed and at his own cost. However, the Education Code, promulgated on 20 June 1955, lays down that the State shall pay for his travel and that of his family.

Until very recently the standard of living of Bolivian school teachers was anything but high. In fact, during the past year and the beginning of this one, it fell to an alarmingly low level, and was considerably below that of even the more modest manual workers. Under conditions so unfavorable to their individual and collective interest, Bolivian school teachers, slowly but surely set to work to strengthen their position and in the last few days they have obtained further victories. The following rights have been revindicated by them to date:

a) Readjustment of basic salary to 290% of the amount previously received, by an agreement reached between Government representatives and those of the teachers' unions;

b) Family allowances; allowances for each child, according to a special scale;

c) Housing allowances, a fixed sum paid to all school teachers whether married or single;

d) Nursing bonus: received throughout the period of nursing in accordance with the provisions of or social welfare laws in force;

e) Rent allowance, as established by social welfare law;

f) Additional percentage increments paid to all school-teachers, according to a scale based on length of service as follows: 30% to those in the fourth category, 40% to those in the third category, 50% to those in the second category and 60% to those in the first category.

g) Books allowance: a monthly sum allocated for the purchase of books;

h) Zone and frontier rights: the former consisting of a fixed monthly sum and the latter of an allowance of 20% of the basic salary, as compensation for residence and travel cost, exceptionally high in certain frontier areas. Before the present agreements, the frontier rights were 30%, paid in sterling or in US Dollars.

As I mentioned earlier the standard of living of school teachers in Bolivia was until very recently inferior to that of the humblest manual workers, but, due to the above mentioned readjustments and recognition of the school teachers' right to social welfare benefits, it is now definitely higher. The teaching profession is looked on in Bolivia as a moral and material force worthy of respect and able to make itself heard by reasonable means, compatible with due respect for law and order. Its sense of unity and awareness of its own strength is growing with the growing numbers of young people entering its routes from the institution I always refer to as the Bolivian "Normal" (Teachers' Training School). A highly original indeed a unique school in its way, which in forty-seven years of high purposed and intense work has succeeded in considerably raising the cultural strength of men and women of our nation, set in the very heart of South America.

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A great deal of the kinder and primary school teachers' time is taken up in carrying out his school tasks and responsibilities.

On leaving training school, a teacher is required to serve his first two years in a primary or secondary school in the provinces. (In some Bolivian provinces there are mixed secondary schools, complete or incom-

plete). At the end of his time, he may apply to be transferred to a town.

I will now describe the activities, inside or outside the school, of the Bolivian school teacher, known in my country as "*maestro normal*" or "*Preceptor normalista*".

The Bolivian school teacher is responsible for organizing all the technical and administrative details connected with the course he is in charge of. On appointment he takes down personal data about his pupils, gets in touch with their parents, plans their hours of work in accordance with the appropriate program of studies, finds out the level of advancement of his pupils, studies the official program, etc. After a week of careful preparations, he sets about adapting the program to local conditions, making out a time-table duly planned in accordance with customary period or the instructions of his Director. Once work has begun he will spend the next 180 to 200 days between school and home at his work table or enjoying a few moments rest. He prepares his lessons, noting them in a special book which is checked by the Director once a day or once a week, according to the practice of different establishments.

At the end of June and the beginning of July there is a small winter holiday of 15 to 20 days. Some teachers take advantage of it to pay a brief visit to their homes. Most of them remain on the spot and spend their time resting or looking after their private affairs. Hard work is done from January to June by both teacher and pupils, and this winter holiday is appreciated by all.

The primary school-teacher has little time for an active social life. If he leads one, it is completely subordinate to school interests and affairs. Recently more interest has been shown in parents and in the organization of special parents associations. Many schools throughout the country today are developing and progressing under the influence of such associations, through which parents show a very active interest in the material and moral welfare of the school their children attend. The school teacher today does all he can to encourage parents to share the duties, cares and responsibilities of educating their children. Thus the school and all its problems are projected into the home. The school teacher's initiatives and perseverance in overcoming all kinds of difficulties is gradually breaking down family indifference.

Every year towards the middle of October, the 180 to 200 days required by the law are concluded with the promotion examinations. The school year is at an end and school teachers are free for about two months. These long vacations may be used in two apparently contradictory ways. School-teachers working in the provinces prefer to spend them in town, and those who work in the towns generally chose the provinces or "the country" — preferably the banks of

rivers, the hills or the valley. Both sectors of the teaching profession thus find rest from their toil and the satisfaction of their desires through this interesting and quite natural exchange.

One of the principal aspirations of the Bolivian school teacher is to achieve mastery in the true skill of teaching, to "practice intuition" as the expression goes. He will wear himself out in the attempt and stop at no economic sacrifice to obtain the necessary books and materials. While fully appreciative of any balanced theoretical doctrine, he remains eminently practical. He is not fond of theorizing, pedagogic chatters and is more interested in seeing and learning "how it's done" than in hearing merely "what ought to be done". He tends to be skeptical the kind of pedagogic literature in which teaching is made to appear as one uninterrupted succession of achievements, successes and triumphs, and sometimes wonders whether the school-teachers, children and young people overseas are not as human as those of his own country. He is no longer much impressed by the well meaning theories of missions or by any verbal form of cooperations. For forty-seven years he has seen and is still seeing the development of a technical work that speaks for itself, that is its own practical proof. The work of the National Teachers' Training School as it is known today, and of the other teaching centers of the country.

Primary and secondary teachers have made considerable contribution to the cultural development of

the country by publishing books for the use of teachers. Today the fervent wish of a Bolivian school teacher is to obtain practical aid in the attempt to revise and improve his techniques, and to broaden his essentially balanced and pragmatic culture.

The teaching profession in Bolivia is grouped into two large unions: the Syndicate of Fundamental Education Teachers and the Syndicate of Urban Teachers. Each has a central committee presided over by a government official, and both together form part of the National Confederation of School teachers, with the leadership of the Central Executive Committee which sits at the headquarters of each in turn. If the latter Committee fails to serve the interest and wishes of the profession adequately, it may be deprived of its authority. The district unions agree to pass a vote of censure, and control of the Unions is taken over by a Provisional Committee.

Every two years a School Teachers' Congress discusses all Union matters concerning the profession as well as those connected with the organization of the schools and the economic structure of education. These Congresses have been highly influential in building up a unified teaching staff. They have eliminate all barriers between the different types of education, and have even done away with political differences.

I hope this modest effort will go some way towards providing you with the information you wanted about the education system and activities of school teachers in my country.

Three B's of Assamese Culture

By Naranjan Singh Uppal

THREE "B" 's dominate the cultural life of the people of Assam, an Indian state sandwiched between East Pakistan and Burma. They are Bhaona (drama), Bhaoria (the lyrical poet) and Bahua (the jester).

Bhaona may not come within the full definition of drama as it is understood in the West, but it conveys events and characters with great dramatic effect, and uses dance and music in the presentation.

The **Bhaoria** is a lyrical poet who composes verses extempore. These verses are sung, mostly on religious and social occasions, either solo or in chorus with others. After a day's hard work, the Assamese enjoy an evening's rollicking and dancing to the Bhaoria songs and, for a moment, they forget all the worries of life.

The **Bahua**, in his jester's garb, regales the audi-

ence with his pokes and comic acting his "turn" is generally interspaced between acrobatic feats by other performers.

Early dramatic expression in Assamese took the form of naratives accompanied by singing and dancing. Tales from the **Puranas**, the Hindu sacred book, were presented occasionally with the help of "mudres" or gestures. Later, the **Ankiya-Natas**, one-act plays, came into being.

The oldest form of Assamese drama is called **Ojapali**. It is performed in the open space with the people forming a ring. The principal actor narrates mythological stories in verse. Occasionally he dances and holds dialogues in prose with another actor, and the whole company joins in singing and dancing. Once or twice during the play, a muste female character called **Deodhani** dances to please the Goddess **Manasa**.