

Further Strengthening the Public School Teaching Personnel

By Marcelino Bautista

THE title of this article implies that there is some strength in the personnel of the public schools; it also implies that there are some weaknesses. The article being what it is, there is a little more emphasis on the weaknesses. An article on the points of strength could be developed just as adequately.

One word of caution is necessary at this point: Unless a weakness mentioned is indicated as generalized, whatever instances are narrated to stress a point need not imply a generalization. The instance merely indicates tendencies, trends, or "signs of the times."

Lack of Funds Has Lowered Personnel Standards

The first weakness of the public school personnel that may be mentioned is the fact that inadequate appropriations have tended to lower the standards required for entrance into the service. Those already in the service inevitably lowered their standards of working efficiency.

The best talents among our young people do not go into teaching, because there is very little attraction in the meager pay. The well-known aphorism needs repeating here: "Those who can't, teach." Mental ability tests administered to college students in the Philippines show that those enrolled in the colleges of education are not anywhere near the top rank. Similar tests administered in the United States placed the teaching group in the fifth rank, below engineers, clergymen, accountants, and physicians (in that order). Moreover, 67.49% of the public school teachers are women (1956 statistics), which shows that men with superior talent do not usually go into the teaching profession.

Lack of funds means low pay, which in turn means lack of incentives for outstanding achievement. "What is the use?" is not an uncommon attitude.

The Political Atmosphere Has Deleterious Effects

There is universal recognition of the fact that politics is the main industry of the Philippines. Politics affects every phase of living. The work of teaching has not been free from its baleful effects.

It is well known that the Secretary of Education is a political appointee. Under the present government set-up, this is necessary. The man at the top of the Department must be influential enough with the party in power to be able to get the needed appropriations. In turn, he must wield his influence upon his subordinates so that they would always support the administration. Since the Secretary owes his position to political influence, he also appoints those under him to please the people who put him there. And so whenever there are vacancies in the lower offices, the logical development is that people who choose the Secretary also select some of the officials down below. Sometimes the right people ("right" by virtue of merit) are selected. Human nature being what it is, there are times when the right people may not be the ones selected.

The matter of political connections influencing the selection of the lower-category personnel does not hold true, however. Teachers enter the service either by passing civil service examinations or by qualifying in the annual teachers competitive tests. But once the teacher is in, she may be subject to all kinds of political and other outside pressures. School personnel are sometimes transferred for no other reason except that they are related to or closely associated with people who are political enemies of those who are in power. Bureau officials often say to such outside pressure agents: "File your charges; we shall have them investigated." The charges are not usually filed. Cases are known in which school personnel were hounded by such pressure-groups. Where local officials can do anything with the school budgets, positions of those who do not toe the line are sometimes abolished.

Sometimes requests for the transfer of school personnel are made because of some misunderstanding as to the meaning and implementation of a school policy. The attitude of some politicians is often in this form: "If you are not with me, you are against me."

If a school official owes his assignment or promotion to some outside influence other than his own merits, he has to kowtow to the person or persons who obtained the assignment for him. It is not unknown that in some instances the padrinos have had to be consulted in the appointment of high school teachers, in places where no competitive examinations are held to select high school teachers. And these school officials defend their actuations thus: it is these government officials that provide the funds for the high school. Their wishes should be respected in certain respects.

This pernicious influence of political and other pressures dictating upon the administration of the schools may at times be traceable to the school per-

sonnel themselves. Sometimes when one wants a certain position, he works for it through outside influences, even to the extent of "stepping on the back of another in order to reach up." There is a provision in the Teachers Code of Ethics which says, "Do not apply for a vacancy that does not exist." The injunction is sometimes disregarded. The result of all this is that ill feeling is generated between the incumbent and the one who wants his position. The strategy is to get the other fellow transferred to some other place in order to create a vacancy.

The Social Status of Teachers Has Gone Down

The public school personnel have somewhat gone down in social prestige, especially in places like the metropolitan areas where there are many "educated" people. In less developed areas, the teacher is still held in high esteem. In parts of Moroland, for instance, the teacher sits next to the "imam" in social gatherings. In the Mountain Province, the teacher is considered an "apo-apo." Not so in the more sophisticated areas. The reason for the lowered social status is the comparative low income of teachers in places where many people have larger income. The penny-pinching teacher who has many "vales" in the tiendas cannot be highly respected. Moreover, there have been instances when teachers were charged with all kinds of venalities that resulted in general lowering of prestige. While some of these charges have been proven false, the teachers in such places were not entirely "above suspicion." Involvement in such charges has not been confined to lower-category teachers.

The pernicious influence of politics and other outside pressure has also contributed to the lowering of teachers' prestige. For it can easily become known when a promotion or choice assignment has been due to considerations other than merit. Such things cannot be withheld from the knowledge of people. The lowering of prestige is sometimes due to manipulations engendered by the desire to secure permanency of tenure. The well-known cases of teachers who presented falsified credentials of war-service in order to add 5% more to their civil service examination ratings is a case in point.

Much of the Idealism of Teaching Has Disappeared

Many years ago, teaching was considered a high calling. It was regarded as some kind of missionary work. Teachers were pervaded with the high idealism of service. Today that idealism has largely disappeared. The reason for this is not difficult to seek. This is an age of materialism. Teaching is a means of earning a livelihood. We must hasten to say that there are still hundreds of teachers in the rank and file who regard their calling with high idealism, those

especially who have grown gray hair on the job. One instance is now recalled: A teacher out there in Cebu has fishponds which yield for her ten times her salary as teacher. She was asked why she had to continue teaching, and her reply was:—"I love teaching; I love growing children. And if I got out, I would miss the companionship of my colleagues."

By and large, however, the recent arrivals in the public school teaching field look upon teaching as a means of earning a living. "Those who can't, teach." It must be said, however, that perhaps because of this desire to hold on to the job in order to earn a living many of the younger teachers are proving to be good teachers. Since most of them are temporary (they have not qualified in the civil service examination), they must give good service, otherwise they are dropped from the rolls. As of the school year 1955-56, only 44.77% of the teaching force were civil service eligibles. The remaining 57.23% must deliver the goods, or else. And most of them do deliver the goods.

The matter of one's being regular, however, has its good as well as its bad points. The teacher who is regular feels that she no longer needs to grow, to be constructive, to be creative. If she renders "passing" performance, she is safe. There have been very few cases of regular teachers having been eased out of the service due to inefficiency. It is difficult to ease them out even if they render only "borderline" satisfactory service.

In the United States, teachers are still working for regular tenure. American teachers as a whole sign teaching contracts for a definite number of years. Their contracts are renewed if they show good performance. There are no civil service examinations through which regular tenure is acquired. In the American system, the teacher must be constantly growing in the profession, otherwise her contract is not renewed. In the Philippines, the regular teacher is usually the one who has gone to seed, because being regular she knows she cannot be easily ousted. Despite the higher salary provided in the Teachers Salary Law for those with high educational qualifications, some of the oldsters find it inconvenient to go back to school, to increase their educational and professional qualifications. The result of all of this is that the younger teachers are more progressive, more constructive and more creative.

There is one redeeming feature of the regular appointment. The regular teacher knows that her tenure is secure. She is not so easily browbeaten, not only because she is more mature but also because she has learned to get along. She can get along better, not because she is more malleable but because she has acquired all kinds of experiences in dealing with all kinds of bosses. In short, she is wiser. She is more emotionally stable and therefore is less likely to get into trouble.

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"Mice or Men"

The thought about "browbeating" in the preceding paragraph takes us to the question of whether or not teachers as a whole are victims of the haughtiness and arbitrariness of superiors. A local columnist once asked the rhetorical question, "Are teachers mice or men?" The answer to that question cannot be categorical. There are hundreds of teachers that will stand up for their rights. Unfortunately, there have been instances in the past when teachers showed by their actuations that they could be classified as mice. The most glaring evidence of this is the fact that, even if teachers know that it would be to their best interest to become members of the Philippine Public School Teachers Association, they do not become members if there is any indication that their immediate bosses are not interested in the Association or are not in good terms with those who manage the Association's affairs. The records of the Association will reveal the identity of certain administrative officials who are not sympathetic to the objectives and ideals of the Association. In the divisions where these school officials were the top men, the percentages of membership in the Association have been very low.¹ Teachers in those divisions become members only if they are asked to do so by their bosses. If the bosses do not give them the go-signal, they do not become members.

Why are some school officials antagonistic to the interests of the Association? Some of these people believe, rightly or wrongly, that the Association at some time in the past tended to promote cleavage between the upper-category and the lower-category personnel. The Alzate case can be given as an example.² Looking at this matter from the point of view of those who administer the affairs of the Association, the thinking could be as follows: Cleavage obtains now where not enough is done to protect teachers' rights, where school officials are arbitrary and undemocratic. The efforts of the Association exerted toward getting a better deal for the lower-category teachers are an attempt to minimize the cleavage. In other words, the Association's efforts do not create the cleavage into being; the cleavage exists, believe it or not, in places where there are undemocratic practices. To bring this state of affairs into public focus is not creating a cleavage. Those who manage the affairs of the Association hope to minimize or eliminate the cleavage by correcting the sources of cleavage.

It may now be claimed, despite differences of opinion on this matter of cleavage, that the Association

¹ In some of these school divisions, the percentage of membership has seldom reached 10%. As of 1956-57, the national percentage of membership was close to 70%.

² Anacleto B. Alzate, a high school principal, refused to be transferred to another assignment. He won a court case, in which it was ruled that government employees cannot be transferred against their will.

has contributed to no little extent toward the awakening of teachers to the possibility that if they are united there would be less tendency for them to be imposed upon. Have they ever been imposed upon? Not only have there been impositions upon their pocketbooks; there have been impositions upon their minds. Up to recent years, teachers have been insecure. They have been transferred to less desirable assignments upon the slightest provocation.

The usual method of appeasement if one wants to be secure in his position or assignment is not to talk back, not to criticize the bosses or their policies. And when a transfer to a less desirable assignment impends, the "regalo" is the method of appeasement. (By the way, a regalo, in the Filipino value system, is not a bribe *per se*. It is only some kind of "paalaala.") The same is true if one wants to get a promotion.

Up to recent years, many teachers feared their bosses. The records of the PPSTA show many letters received from the field, containing complaints about the arbitrariness of school officials. Invariably, these letters end with a postscript: "Please do not mention my name; I fear reprisals."

Having been for eight years the manager of the affairs of the PPSTA, it might be immodest for the writer to make this claim, but the claim may be taken for what it is worth: the establishment of the PPSTA has contributed to no little extent toward making the rank and file of teachers feel they now have an Association that can voice their sentiments and can stand to protect their rights if this should become necessary. The opposition to teachers' becoming members of the Association on the part of some school officials should now be understandable. If the Association does not and cannot do things for the members, what is the Association for?

One form of imposition upon teachers' minds is that they can seldom depend upon merit to secure promotions for them. Reference has been made earlier in this article to the pernicious influence of politics upon the morale of teachers. But it is not politics alone that interferes with the promotion system based upon merit. Whether true or not, there is a pervasive feeling on the part of teachers that promotion is based upon the whims and caprices of bosses. "It is not what you know or can do; it is the connections that count." The "connections" are oftentimes determined by one's relationship with the bosses. If you are in their good graces, promotions can easily come your way. That is the general feeling.

The result of this is that many a teacher who has rendered many years of service feels that the only thing to do is to mark time, to pile up seniority. The older ones have seen younger people go up, thus bypassing them. It is usually true, however, that the

younger ones who are promoted deserve the promotions. While the older teacher wants a promotion, she may not have done anything to show her worth. The younger ones have been growing in the service; they have done everything to make their work creative and constructive.

There is much that can be said against the present system (or lack thereof) of promotions. The efficiency rating counts a great deal in the matter of promotions. And yet the efficiency rating is based on the estimate of one's work, generally by only one or two persons. Something should be done to work out and enforce a more objective manner of determining efficiency rating so that the true worth of a teacher can be objectively assessed. That the fate and fortune of a teacher should be determined by one's personal relationships with her superior is one of the amazing stupidities of a bureaucratic system.

A subordinate may have been making good efficiency ratings for several years, but let him have a quarrel with the immediate boss just once, and that subordinate is a goner insofar as promotions are concerned. That is how cruel a poorly administered rating system could be.

Complaints about a faulty promotion system can of course stem from a characteristic weakness of human nature. Even among well "educated" people, self-appraisal is at times faulty. One's special qualifications and "achievements" can be grossly exaggerated. In such instances, the thought persists: "I am just as good as the other fellow, perhaps better. What has she got that I haven't got?" It sometimes happens that one's own interpretation of the seniority rule, and especially of the efficiency rating of which the rule is a part, may be unduly favorable to himself. Humility, insofar as promotions are concerned, is not an exclusive virtue of teachers; especially so if they mean so many more additional pesos to the family income.

The question that is really important in this connection is: Can it be worked out so that promotions may be based largely on merit? That can be worked out satisfactorily, provided outside interference does not throw a monkey wrench into the scheme of promotions. Thus, we meet the old evil once more: the Bureau of Public Schools and the people who administer its affairs find themselves almost helpless to do what is right — all because of political or other outside interference.

Wherein Lies the Hope?

We are running around—in a vicious circle. There is political and other outside interference in the affairs of the Bureau of Public Schools, because the very life of the Bureau and of the teachers depends upon that interference. An antagonistic political regime would not make the funds available with which to run the

school system efficiently. Politicians can cut down on appropriations, and they can even abolish items and positions.

The hope for freedom of the Bureau of Public Schools to administer its own affairs lies in three directions:

1. Make the position of Secretary of Education a constitutional position, just like the positions of justices, judges, and the Auditor-General. These officials do not have to submit courtesy resignations upon change of administration. In that way, they are independent and therefore can pursue their work and carry out their functions without interference. All positions in the Department and the Bureau which are filled by political (Presidential) appointments should be made constitutional offices. Can this ever be done? If this should be done, the politicians would lose the big chance of having their fingers in the pie, as it were. Therefore, they will be disinclined to make these positions constitutional. But there is hope that the political mire will clean-up sometime, and there is also hope that a new regime will some time be installed which will make this change possible.

2. Another hope lies in the recruitment and training of a school officialdom and teaching force that will refuse to use politics or other outside influence to secure positions and promotions for them. This will take time, just as any other good thing will come in God's own time. But it is not impossible to build up a school personnel that will stand up on their own merits and shall not use anything but merit to promote their individual and personal interests. There are so many to select from now. (Some 30,000 elementary school teachers are out of job.) By careful screening and thorough "indoctrination" in the ethics of the profession, it is hoped that only men and women of high integrity and idealism will be recruited for teaching.

3. The third hope lies in the education of the parents of our children toward greater solicitude on behalf of the school and the school children. We hope that sometime not very far from now, the parents of our school children will have become educated enough to take a more watchful attitude over the affairs of the schools. When that comes, we hope that they will want their children to be instructed well and to be brought up well, by teachers who have a high sense of integrity and by school officials who will not permit their administration to be balled up by outside interference. That state of affairs will take a long time to come into being, but there is hope that it will come into being. Parent-Teacher Associations are becoming more and more mature in respect to what kind of education they want their children to acquire from schooling. When they become familiar with what kind of education is best for their children they will want to have only the best teachers and the best

school officials. They will then be in a position to demand that the schools themselves must be free from outside interference.

The Teachers We Shall Need

To insure a highly professionalized body of teachers, a group that will bring forth the new freedom for the schools, we should begin training and recruiting those who have the following characteristics, qualities, and qualifications:

1. The good teacher is well educated and cultured. She cannot afford to be ignorant, because she must interest her young charges in the pulsating life of the environment. She is wide awake to the various issues in public life. She must be well cultured, because the uncouth teacher will produce only uncouth citizens. Favorable straws in the wind: the requirements for entrance into the service are becoming more and more rigid. The talented people will have better chances to qualify for teaching. They will work for higher pay, commensurate with their talents. The mediocre people are satisfied with little pay.

2. The good teacher knows what democracy is and practices what she knows. The good teacher is not a sycophant. She knows the importance of the freedom of self-expression. She knows that the desire for self-expression is a psychological urge. She knows that the repression of that urge is not good, for the only chance for it to be corrected is to express it. She knows that an unexpressed opinion cannot contribute anything to common thinking. An unexpressed idea cannot do any good to any one. The good teacher cannot be browbeaten. She knows that if she is right, nothing can touch her, and so she will speak out.

3. The good teacher realizes that she is a living model of high-quality citizenship, and that she will do nothing to jeopardize the teacher's influence and prestige in the eyes of those whom she serves. She knows that the teacher is one public official that is constantly under public scrutiny. She knows that she should not displease her public.

4. The good teacher knows that there is no money in teaching. While there are many materialists among teachers, it is perhaps also true that many young people who prepare themselves for teaching are imbued with high idealism. It has been dinned into their ears time and again, before they take up teaching as a life career, that the work of teaching is poorly paid. That they still want to be teachers in spite of this knowledge documents the fact of their possessing high idealism. After they get in, they are disillusioned. This fact becomes known to others who want to become teachers. Knowing all of these things many still want to become teachers.

5. Good teachers know that erudition is not the same as education. They want to teach their young charges so that these latter may grow into maturity, able to think effectively, communicate thought, make relevant judgments, and discriminate between values. The development of good personalities is their obsession. The good teacher keeps this basic objective in mind.

6. The good teacher loves the company of growing young people. She also loves to work with people. She takes keen interest in the unfolding of wholesome personalities. One of the greatest satisfactions of being a teacher is to realize years later that she has contributed toward making young people what they have become. The greatest tribute a person can pay to a former teacher is this statement: "If it had not been for your patience in teaching me, I would not be what I am now". That is one of the attractions of teaching.

7. The good teacher continuously grows toward competency; she never goes to seed. She is forever curious about things, and her mind always wants to learn something new. She keeps on studying and learning; she is never at a standstill, intellectually speaking.

8. The good teacher is emotionally stable. She is not one that "blows in, blows up, and blows out." She is the person that keeps cool under stress. She is warm in her feelings, and she is deep in her sympathies, but she keeps her temper under control. She has Job's proverbial patience. It is not often realized by the average person that the teacher has, not two or three problems in her hands, but forty and sometimes fifty. The parent who himself maltreats his own child, perhaps the only problem that he has, often forgets that the teacher has many more than he, when the parent complains about how the teacher has treated his child.

9. The good teacher has guts, and she has self-reliance. She tries to solve her own problems and fights for her rights. She does not wait for others to solve her problems for her; as a matter of fact, she knows how to solve them before they break out. In other words, she forestalls the eruption of problems.

10. The good teacher is loyal to principles, not to persons. She has convictions and she stands on them.

She has an open mind, but she has principles to begin with. She has no padrino to run to when she has to fight for her convictions. She has confidence that she is right and knows how to defend herself from outside interference.

11. The good teacher is not very much concerned with promotions; she has confidence that they will come as she deserves them. She is not eager to claim credit for herself; she feels that oftentimes credit belongs to her who needs it.

12. The good teacher is not a saint; she is only a sensible human being. She knows that if she were a saint, she would be some place else and not in the classroom. And so she feels and behaves as a human being.

This list could be lengthened, but it is long enough to indicate what can be expected of the good teacher. A thorough self-examination should be made by one who becomes or wants to become a teacher. Teaching does not pay; almost every one knows that. If a person wants to become a teacher anyhow, it may be presumed that she has the making of a 'good teacher.

The good teacher makes a good school official or administrator; her qualifications, characteristics and qualities are the same. The good teacher matures into and gets promoted to the position of good school official and administrator when the time comes. She does not worry about that.

To Summarize

This article has indicated in what aspects the public school personnel could be strengthened so that better education could be made available to our children and youth. Some suggested remedies have also been indicated, and it is admitted that the proposed remedies are difficult to effect. It behooves all citizens interested in better education to take more positive interest in the common effort to correct the problems. A militant public opinion is oftentimes effective in bringing about socially desirable changes. If we want better schools and more adequate education, the citizens must be more militant in fiscalizing the school system and more assiduous in bringing about much needed reform.

