

"Let the Teacher Talk---!"

By Carlos G. Beltran *

"... A ray of light in the sea of darkness... a solid rock in the shifting sands of ignorance... a staunch pillar in the structure of our national existence," thus run the praises cast to the four winds that have swamped the teacher with adulation; singling him out from the obscure background that has shrouded his chosen task. Eulogized whenever political expediency demands it, the teacher as usual, has come in for his oft-repeated laurels fittingly dispensed with pledges for the betterment of his lot emanating from so many quarters that have taken a sudden spurt of interest in his welfare... for this is an election year!

We rue the day politics reared its ugly head and spread its vicious tentacles entwining everything in its path; strangling certain ethical principles in a malevolent grasp. Politics has become the order of the day. It has seeped into every level and strata of life and permeated even the very atmosphere in which we breathe and live. In its wage, nothing has been spared; even components of our educational system have been buffeted by pernicious political influence which seek to undermine our moral trust and confidence.

In spite of the fact that the teacher has cast his lot with those he has sworn to serve, in spite of the fact that his is the guiding hand that steers the growth of a more dynamic and democratic way of life... his is the voice that still has to find utterance! His lips are often mute on the vital issues of the day; for politics has become his forbidden fruit yet the temptations cast his way are legion. How can the teacher help remedy the ills of the prevailing times, if in the exercise of this right, the words are squelched right in his mouth for fear of the consequences... for the powers of politics are vast and far-reaching? His very words, gestures and actuations can be twisted, by those who have axes to hone, to serve a sinister purpose. He can be "crucified" for his views and in the end appear discredited—an outcast to the service! What guarantee or immunity then has the teacher against political reprisals which have practically left him naked in the keen of the politically influential against which he has no defense whatsoever to ward off the prostitution of the tenets of the teaching profession?

* For the first time, a classroom teacher has taken the guts to write of his views on politics. The "Morfe Decision" in Pangasinan is an eye-opener. Hence, this article... a food for thought!

God forbid that someday the "bureau of public schools shall attain the same stature as the bureau of public works"; for unless a safeguard is placed somewhere to draw the limits to political intrusion, the educational system can never be safe from contamination. We need not search far and wide to find evidences of the "hands that pulled the strings"... where certain interested parties have managed to poke their fingers through the crust of the pie in order to reach at the fillings. Many applicants for teaching positions are now armed with recommendations from certain political bigwigs; promotions have even been said to run through the gauntlet of political intervention, and even transfers in some cases have been colored by political flavors. Fortunately, there are still many administrators who won't take any political intrusion lying down and who can't be budged from the defense of the principles the profession holds inviolate and sacred.

Let the teacher talk! The times demand this change. Let him talk of political developments, issues, candidates and platforms without fear or reservation as he would of his daily work, the prevailing weather, or his religion. Let the half-a-century gag be taken away from his mouth; let him speak in unmistakable terms his intelligent appraisal of events and contribute his bit to raise politics to a higher plane. Give back to him the power of speech, stifled by decades; to help shape and mould the trend of public sentiment and put to a profitable use his bulwark of democratic thinking.

Let the teacher evaluate the political issues without any qualm of conscience, let him scrutinize aloud the qualifications and actuations of those aspiring for a position of public trust. But above all, let him shed a ray of light from the wisdom that God has endowed him to illumine the path of the common mass and those with so little in life... for in law, they should and ought to have more.

Somewhere, is the missing link, in a set-up decidedly unfair to the teacher. Politicians won't let the teacher alone. Every time an election fight looms, the teacher's mail is studded with political propaganda; he becomes an inevitable target especially in the rural areas where campaigners and sympathizers seek him out at all hours. If the teacher can't be left alone, as there is no law to prohibit or punish those

who bombard him with facts and lies—what course of action can he take to separate the chaff from the grain?

How truthfully and fittingly has a leading magazine summed up the prevailing situation: "Who is the enemy? The enemy is potentially every man or woman running for election who eagerly or weakly sacrifices the country, a chunk of it, or all of it for that extra fistful of votes that wins the present for him and loses the future for everybody else. He has done it before, he is doing it now and he will do it again if he is not stopped."¹

Only when the teacher shall talk freely and add the weight of his voice to that of his contemporaries to form a mounting tide that shall re-echo without fear or restraint...can it then be possible to reap the assurances we seek! To rebel against the ills and spoils of politics can be uphill but it no longer

¹ Weekly Women's Magazine, "Lesson Plan For Politicians," September 13, 1957, by Yay Marking.

shall be sporadic and futile. A hundred thousand teachers backed by a sizeable potential strength of dependents constitute a formidable force that will make any politician think not only twice but a thousand times...before attempting half-baked educational measures, niggardly doles, juggling of items and abolishing positions, pressure and intervention. No longer have the teachers to depend on the unpredictable temperament of the powers-that-be for much needed appropriations; nor do they have to "beg" for what is rightfully theirs...for those antagonistic to the cause of the teachers and of education, have a score to settle on the day of reckoning at the polls.

Let the teacher talk! Only when the rigid ban on his all-out participation as the vanguard of an enlightened citizenry be finally scraped, and only when the standing regulation thrust into his mouth as a gag be repealed...can we finally hope to contain and eventually ward off political encroachments and preserve the sanctity of our educational system.

How Responsible Are We?

By **Silvina C. Laya**

WE influence our students for good or for bad. Some ape the way we talk, walk, act. The teacher does everything just right. The teacher is perfect. For there is such a thing as teacher crush.

We also influence students for the worse. Of course, we indignantly say "never!" for what teacher will ever do that? Our attitudes and habits may have negative effect on students. How?

When we see nothing good in the actuations of government officials and when we criticize mercilessly government institutions, we develop cynicism among our students. Worse, we may develop hatred of government. For who can be more destructive and unreasonable than those who have no background of facts and whose minds have been made up for them?

We want our students to have good habits. We want them to come to school on time and to be regular in attendance. But what do we do? We come late to class. (Any way it is only second bell.) Or we absent ourselves a period or two when we feel like doing it. We mark ourselves undertime, you say. But we forget many things could happen when we are out, and morally, we are responsible. When students play truant, who are we to give them a piece of our mind?

We want our students to form the habit of studying every day. We give them kilometeric assignments. Our subject is the most important, you know. We call the roll, scold the class a little for exercise; or if in the right mood, tell stories. The bell rings and we get surprised. Accomplishment: lesson hardly touched.

We give the class homework. All must submit or else... We collect and we fail to check. Once, twice, thrice. And the students get wise. (Was that the wrapping paper at the corner store?)

We want to develop a sense of fair play among students. Yet we play favorites. Our "pet" does nothing wrong. Worse we listen to gossip and swallow it hook, line and sinker. Are you surprised then to see flagrant violations of the merit system?

We think it nothing to say a word or two against a colleague who has displeased us. We are not beyond juicy bits of information about this and that person. Do you see the connection between this and mud slinging of election times?

We want our students to study for love of it. Grades do not matter; it is what you get that counts. But you and I go to a diploma mill. Yes, you have