



IN THE SCHOOLS—WHO REMAIN?

by PURA SANTILLAN-CASTRENCE

The Toledo teachers in Ohio have struck. So have the Buffalo teachers, the Boston teachers. Some for a higher standard of salary, some for a rehashing of antiquated methods of teaching.

Here we have followed suit. In various of our schools our teachers have decided to forget the much-touted "teachers' dignity," and have asked openly and without mincing words for a raise in salary. Wasn't it in Tarlac that the teachers' walk-out strike took place?

The university professors and instructors haven't glossed over their "vul-

gar feelings" either about the necessity of financial justice for them. A group, under the leadership of Dr. Bernabe Africa, has been formed into an association expressly for the flagrant purpose of effecting measures for the better treatment of educators—"better treatment" being the euphemistic term for more adequate pay.

The war has shaken our values in many ways. Material values, moral values, spiritual values. In the first place—where material values are concerned—plainly and literally, everything costs now about five to eight times

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what it did before the war. As to moral values—there is definite laxity in the general outlook on such seemingly permanent quantities as integrity, virtue, modesty, honesty. Spiritual values, so akin to moral, have gone overboard too, so much so that educators everywhere have left called upon to put sanity into a world gone panicky, chaotic, bewildered, unreasoning. A woman-writer of note has labelled the last World War as a War for Decency, in contradistinction to World War I which we had called the War for Democracy. But are we more “decent” now after having “won” the war than before?

The question is not merely rhetorical. And the answer is *no*. What are we doing, or going to do about it? We are going to educate the people, from the children up, the decent way of life, the importance of man, the dignity of the individual. For this task

we need teachers, good teachers, teachers who love to teach... Yet the answer to this demand, to this crying need of the moment, are letters such as this one of a Georgia teacher to his Superintendent, one of the many, many teachers who have found themselves hard put to it by circumstances beyond their control:

“Dear Sir: ●

“I don’t think I’ll teach any more. I am now earning \$8.25 weekly. I can’t get married on that. I reckon I’ll go to work on the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad. They pay section hands \$7 a day.

“I like to teach. If you can pay more, write me. If not I’ll be over Tuesday with the books and black-board...”

Yet, too, it is an accepted fact, everywhere admitted, that education is the main answer to the world’s present di-

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lemma, the "ultimate key to world order!"

There is no use getting "blubbery" over the plight of teachers, for tears cannot give them material ease; no use writing panegyrics about them, for praises would not buy decent shoes for their children; no use, indeed, for waxing eloquent over such sentiments as Henry Adams' "A parent gives life, but as parent gives no more. A murderer takes life, but his deed stops there; a teacher affects eternity, he can never tell where his influence stops." It seems that the time to feel, but not to do anything, about such sentiments is past—what the present calls for is that the people face the problems posed by the teachers and act accordingly.

Everybody must admit that one of the most important world-unifying entities at the moment is the UNESCO—the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Its organizers aptly claim that its goal is to emphasize the ideal of "peoples talking to peoples." How can this goal be reached? By education. And who will educate the people? The teachers, naturally.

Dr. Julian Huxley, eminent British scientist and executive secretary of UNESCO, says that illiteracy is one of the greatest challenges to world unity. How can illiteracy be conquered? By education. And who will do the teaching? The teachers, naturally.

The importance of mass communication of bringing the advances in education, the arts and the sciences to the ordinary citizens of every country, of eradicating prejudices all over the face of the earth, need not, of course, be the work of teachers alone, as for this task, the radio, the movies and the press may be availed of; yet, even here, the teachers' role is indispensable. For upon him, in his classroom, devolves the interesting and highly stimulating function in integrating knowledge and presenting it as a whole, a glowing part of life, significant equally in its diverse aspects as in its entirety. Education, according to an eminent authority, is like a kite on the ground, unless implemented by "wind" — good teachers, I suppose—to make it rise.

Very well, then—we have all this work for teachers to do. What, in turn, are we doing for them? And for the past, ill-paid work they did for us, what have we done for them? We have starved them then, and we are starving them now. We are allowing them to go to seed on a salary less than a laborer's, a carpenter's, a restaurant waiter's. (In one new office of our government, a stenographer receives more than an instructor in the state university).

We are letting them down, these teachers, by obliging them, through our indifference to their problems, to seek jobs elsewhere, jobs they are ill-fitted

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for, jobs in which, heart-broken, they have to use means they, in their simple integrity, despise—namely, politics. Unhappy mavericks, in a flock of gandy mediocrities they find themselves forever trying to forget long-served principles of honesty, self-discipline and devotion to duty. The more callous finally find their niche in their newly-found politically-run world and decide, to ease their conscience, that everything has turned out for the best.

In the schools, who remain? Three types of teachers. Those who are, otherwise, financially sound enough so that even with their measly monthly salaries they can get along. Those who can't go out because they know no other work but teaching and are neither adjustable enough, nor intelligent enough, nor versatile enough, nor courageous enough to face the challenge of another job. And those who are such ingrained (almost inspired, I would say) teachers that they feel the love of their profession reward enough for the sufferings and the sacrifices they and the families they support have to undergo in the way of privations, low standard of living, inadequate cultural conditions.

The general result, however, of the material unfairness done to teachers is that those who remain in the fold are

often spiritually downcast—there seems no brightness in their future; those who leave the service, on the other hand, are, not rarely, misfits in their new society; in the schools, the general tendency is to hire any Tom, Dick and Harry who come along claiming knowledge of a subject whose teacher has gone. In the United States, the parents complain: "I just can't bring myself to send my seventh-grade child to a teacher who went no further than the fourth grade herself."

But in the United States where public opinion is both articulate and potent, such complaints seldom fall on deaf ears. Witness, for instance, how Georgia staged "an historic victory." For the first time, so reads a Reader's Digest article, "state schedules gave the highest qualified teachers a salary close to the national average... Today no child in Georgia is going untaught for lack of teachers." Other states, notably Michigan, Oklahoma, and California are following Georgia's example.

Can we make our people, our Congressmen and Senators, our President, give our teachers here, as Georgia gave her teachers, a square deal? It's about time.

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