

What We're Up Against

HOWARD A. DAWSON

"The war has brought additional responsibilities to the teaching profession. We are fighting on far flung fronts to make possible a free world. We must fight on the home front to prepare our future citizens to live and work in such a world. Otherwise victories won at tremendous cost will be lost through ignorance of the principles of democracy. Our children must be worthy of the freedom for which their fathers and mothers are fighting and working. School services must be expanded, not contracted, to stop too early withdrawals, falling attendance and other inroads on the educational well-being of our young people."—MARGARET HICKEY, Chairman, Women's Advisory Committee, War Manpower Commission.

AMERICA'S HOME ARMY includes an estimated 894,000 public school classroom teachers, principals, and supervisors. This educational contingent is dwindling despite the fact that the War Manpower Commission has officially declared educational services¹ to be an essential war activity.

There is a serious and growing shortage of elementary and secondary school-teachers. The potential teacher shortage during the next nine months is estimated at 75,000. Between June, 1942, and March, 1943, some 112,000 teachers left the classroom, permanently or for an indefinite period, to join the armed forces, enter war industry or private employment, marry, retire, take leave

of absence, because of death, or for other reasons.

The dearth of instructors is particularly acute in war-related subjects in which men predominate and in the open country and small town schools in most parts of the country. An Office of Education survey reveals that more than 102,000 rural teachers left their teaching posts for employment in new educational positions or in other occupations between May and October 15, 1942.

Perhaps no one is any better qualified to present the facts about the present teacher shortage than Howard A. Dawson. In testimony before Congressional committees in Washington, D. C., he has used these facts brilliantly to bring home to Congressmen the urgent need for Federal aid to help states pay adequate teachers' salaries. Once a teacher and superintendent in the rural public schools of Arkansas, Dr. Dawson is now Director of the Division of Rural Service in the National Education Association, a position he has held since 1936, and for some time has been secretary of N.E.A.'s Legislative Commission.

¹ A War Manpower directive defines essential educational services as follows: Public and private industrial and agricultural vocational training; elementary, secondary, and preparatory schools; junior colleges, colleges, universities, and professional schools; educational and scientific research agencies; and the production of technical vocational training films.

During the school year 1942-43, approximately 39,000 teachers joined the armed forces while 37,000 teachers were attracted into war industries and other private employment by higher wages. In normal times about 11,000 teachers enter private employment annually.

Normally about 93,000 teachers a year change positions, retire, marry, or otherwise make it necessary that they be replaced. Between 30 and 40 per cent of this number represent transfers to higher-salaried teaching jobs. The teacher-turnover rate, normally about 10 per cent, rose to 21 per cent during the school year 1942-43, with some 189,000 teachers in new positions. The turnover rate was more than twice as great in rural as in urban schools. During the 1942 summer vacation period approximately 34,000 rural teachers found jobs in urban schools at higher pay.

In a teacher-shortage study, the U. S. Office of Education points out that teacher shortages may cause fully as much damage to the American schools through lowered standards of teacher competency as through the actual closing of classrooms.

The extent of the loss of competency is indicated by an eightfold increase during the past year in the number of war emergency certificates issued to teachers who could not meet regular certification requirements, by a large increase in the number of teachers with substandard qualifications, and by a growing number of teachers who were issued regular certificates of lowest grade. The number of emergency certificates totaled 2,305 in the school year 1940-41; 4,655 in 1941-42; and 39,000 in 1942-43.

Commenting on the sharp rise in the

number of war emergency certificates issued, Fannie W. Dunn gloomily prophesies: "The spread between rural and urban standards is widening. If this war is prolonged, the present trend threatens to reduce standards for rural teachers to a level on which they have not been since the Civil War."²

There is also a large decrease in the number of teachers in training. Selective Service and higher salaries in non-teaching occupations have taken their toll of students in schools of education and in teachers colleges, which have lost about one-third of their enrollment during the past two years.

Of the many remedies suggested for taking care of the growing teacher deficit, providing higher salaries is believed to hold greatest promise. This can be readily understood when the following statistics are considered. About 360,000 teachers in the United States, or 40 teachers in every 100, are receiving less than \$1,200 annually. Twenty-six of the 48 States are employing teachers at less than \$600 a year. Half or more of the entire teaching staff in Mississippi and Arkansas is being paid less than \$600. In Maine every sixth teacher is paid less than \$600 annually, in Kansas every fifth.

During the past two years, living costs have risen more than 20 per cent. During this same period, the average salaries of teachers have risen from \$1,470 annually to approximately \$1,500, or less than 10 per cent, in contrast to salaries of factory workers which have increased on the average from \$1,659 annually to \$2,043 and to wages paid

² Dunn, Fannie W.: "Teacher Shortages in Rural Areas," *School and Society*, V. 55, no. 1431, May 30, 1942, 617-620.

Federal employees which have risen on the average from \$1,825 a year to \$1,926.

Helping teachers to understand that education is a patriotic service is another remedial approach to the teacher-shortage situation. Other commonly used methods are the reinstatement of married women ex-teachers and the utilization of other potential teachers in the community. The provision of summer-session and graduate-session short courses for war emergency teachers is assisting greatly in improving the qualifications of emergency teachers.

In the coming school year, tens of thousands of America's children will suffer from the closing of classrooms and the employment of incompetent teachers. Their educational opportunity is being reduced more drastically than any mere statistics on teacher shortages or lower qualification standards might reflect.

An approach to ameliorating the teacher-shortage situation may be found in Bill S. 637 now pending before Congress. Its provisions include authorization of an emergency fund of \$200,000,000 yearly to provide during any year in which Congress finds an emergency exists, money for the states to pay teachers' salaries for any or all of the follow-

ing purposes: (1) to keep schools open for a term of not less than 160 days a year or to make suitable provisions for the pupils affected by closed schools, (2) to raise substandard salaries, (3) to reduce overcrowded classes by the employment of additional teachers, and (4) to adjust the salaries of teachers to meet the increased cost of living during the emergency. These funds would be apportioned to the States on the basis of the number of pupils in average daily attendance in public schools in each State. They would be made available for aiding public elementary schools (which may include kindergarten and nursery schools) and public secondary schools (which may include students through the fourteenth year).

Favorable hearings were held on S. 637 and it has been reported out of the Senate Committee on Education and Labor. Its friends hope it will soon be brought to a vote on the Senate floor, and that the House Committee on Education will hold hearings on H.R. 2849, a similar bill. Teachers who appreciate the importance of this matter should urge their Senators and Representatives in Congress to support these bills and should inform them about the situation in their locality in regard to teacher shortages.

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WHEN ONE witness at a Congressional hearing on Federal aid brought up the subject of the Four Freedoms, Senator Hill, co-author of Bill S.637, said: "I say there is a fifth freedom. The fifth freedom is freedom from ignorance. Unless we can have that fifth freedom, we cannot win the other four freedoms."

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