

ings between the community and the teacher which create the unjustified fears. The effort must rather be to educate the community and the teaching profession to the responsibilities and rights of the teacher as a citizen and as a member of the community. The effort must be toward establishing that community climate which naturally accepts the right of the teacher to be and act like every other citizen.

This question is one single aspect of the larger problem of the teacher as a member of the community. Too often the teachers have viewed themselves as

a group apart, and the lay community has joined in this viewpoint. In some districts, awareness of this unfortunate fact has led to affirmative contriving of artificial means and techniques to bridge the gap between the teaching group and the rest of the community. Much remains to be done in this direction and the effort must come from the teachers as well as from the community itself.

The answer dare not be surrender to a separate class of citizenship or a separate community status for teachers qua teachers.

. . . As Viewed by a Classroom Teacher

RACHEL ROYSTON KNUTSON

THE ROLE of the teacher, as an individual in politics, differs little from that of any other citizen. There are basic responsibilities in which all citizens share alike and in which the teacher is one with the butcher, the baker, the housewife, the business man. A teacher has, with all mature citizens, the responsibility for law observance, for unflinching exercise of the privilege and duty of voting, and for taking active part in politics at the community level to the extent which time will allow.

The teacher's responsibility is great but not compelling to exert direct influence on the political scene. He may

give of time and energy to the selection of candidates at the local level. Many feel that educators should and must—whether they wish or no—take a more effective part in the selection of candidates for public office than they have done or are now doing. A teacher may be called upon to serve in political office, for a limited time. Some believe teachers should go actively into politics to seek financial support for public education. Others believe that this program might better be initiated by citizens who are not teachers but with teacher cooperation, making available their knowledge of government, of history and of human nature.

Thoughtful scrutiny brings two objections to the direct approach, the entrance of teachers actively into politics. First, teachers are relatively few in numbers. At best, their influence from the standpoint of numbers whether as voters or as office holders is

Rachel Royston (Mrs. Edwin E.) Knutson is a teacher, Public Schools, Seattle, Washington. She is a past president of the Seattle Association of Classroom Teachers, and at present is serving as a member of the Legislative Committee of this group.

very slight. Therefore, a teacher's position becomes discouragingly lacking in power. Second, there is the compelling and prime importance a teacher attaches to his own work in relation to the amount of time required to carry on political activity. Most teachers, living and teaching in a world that is far from simple, doing a work which is in its very nature one of the most complex and exacting of all, find when the demands of doing a good professional job are satisfied, there is little time for anything further. About this let there be no mistake; let us recognize one may not be a master in both fields, and a teacher knows the answer for him.

The Teacher's Greatest Influence

Let us look then, at the greatest role a teacher has to play in politics, his greatest role in any activity. It is in the importance of his indirect, often oblique influence on politics and in affairs of everyday life. It is in the lives and thinking of those who are taught.

What are the needs in politics and in everyday life? Those basic are relatively few: the need for honesty, for discerning judgment, for awareness of the avenues of power of the demagogue, the need for ability to seive the content of mass media of communication, and the need for judicious appraisal. Beyond these considerations the need in politics is for trained servants who bring to government much the same sense of obligation which teachers feel toward young people in their charge.

The teacher, then, is most powerful politically when he opens the eyes of his community to see what is real and

to judge what is sound. Certainly the program of the social studies—history, economics, government, social problems—ought to be made alive and real. So also ought the program of teaching science, art, literature and business be made to contribute to the search for truth. If teachers accept the challenge which is peculiarly theirs, that of increasing the range of moral and intellectual vision, then the responsibility truly falls upon every teacher, no matter what his field.

Political failure is inability to judge between what is sound and what is unsound. Philosophy and education have the single aim of increasing awareness of the values of life and as such are indispensable to shaping political policy and opinion. If the teacher addresses himself assiduously to the fundamental task of cultivating critical judgment based upon fact and reason, just so does he become politically important. Judgment matured until it pierces through the licking flames of mass hysteria is to be preferred to the superficial importance of holding political office. Let every teacher through whatever his avenue, assume his share in shaping policy, and let him remember too that when he becomes an office holder, he then ceases to be a teacher.

With Bertrand Russell, I believe that "If the intellectual has any function in society, it is to preserve a cool and unbiased judgment in the face of all solicitations of passion." This being true, the teacher needs to concern himself above all with the task of giving intellectual leadership, of being a powerful, sometimes steady, sometimes stimulating, influence.

Copyright © 1952 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.