

THE last session of the Delaware General Assembly appropriated 60 million dollars for construction of schools in the State of Delaware. Because of the conflicting philosophies which were involved, a heated battle raged both in and out of Legislative Hall in Dover for weeks prior to the passage of this appropriation.

The issues included whether "white schools" should be treated the same as "Negro schools"—even though there is supposed to be no such designation any longer; whether certain districts should be favored or penalized and if so on what kind of reasoning; and even whether or not the schools should be 100 percent state supported. There were hours of hearings as various organizations attempted to influence the outcome. There were lobbyists who talked for hours to "buttonholed" legislators.

When the hearings were finished, and the lobbying seemed to promise little additional information, the elected representatives from each party retired to their respective caucus rooms. Once the doors were closed the final decision making could be accomplished. Trading between the parties was completed by negotiation and the bill was put into the form in which it passed the legislature.

The Caucus Room

The citizens of the State of Delaware can be identified in terms of this particular political decision and an indication of their activity can be seen as a result of such identification. There were many who at the time of the last election could not vote because they were too young, had failed to meet residence requirements or had not registered. If these persons had ignored the political campaigns, we might believe they had had almost

The Teacher as Active Citizen

no effect on the decision. Next in importance would be those who voted and did nothing else. Of stronger influence were those who were active in pressure groups attempting to determine the outcome. Of even greater effect were those who were members of one of the political parties and who actively worked for the election of some of the members of the legislature. Most important, however, were the elected representatives who were where the final decision was made—behind the closed door of the caucus room.

An active citizen is, almost by definition, one who is engaged in and concerned with politics. Aristotle's comment, "He who has the power to take part in the deliberative or judicial administration . . . is a citizen," is still perfectly valid. Because of the nature of our government, such participation is limited to

Russell Dineen is a mathematics teacher, Wilmington High School, Wilmington, Delaware. He is also a Representative to the General Assembly of the State of Delaware and is a candidate for the State Senate.

More Than Voting

casting a secret ballot unless a person is willing to take an active part in pressure groups, in political parties, or in the area of "nonpartisan" politics.

Teachers in the United States are primarily engaged in preparing tomorrow's citizens for participation in society. Through our school system is accomplished the major work of educating a person to act as an economic unit, as a member of a society with certain standards, as a participant in the political process and in the many other ways in which each of us must behave to "live" in this country. The teacher, then, has a primary opportunity to bend the twig that will be tomorrow's tree. Because of this, we are as much concerned with the ethical attitude of teachers as with their technical competence.

It follows that from a negative standpoint, to prohibit political representation from the teaching profession can create a serious defect in the political process. Aside from the belief that a democracy functions well only if the legislative assemblies are truly representative, prohibiting teachers from taking part in such assemblies—whether the prohibition is voluntary with the teachers or part of the law—is to deny the society the benefit of teaching for which it has paid dearly.

Teachers should take part in the political process. Not only to overcome what could be considered a blind spot in our representative system if they were omitted, but also because the profession of teaching is concerned with much of the sort of things which are the determinants of political policy: history, identifying the true nature of problems, devising solutions, observing behavior patterns and interpreting their meaning, etc. The benefit to the individual teacher may be doubtful, but the benefit to the society cannot be questioned.

Political activity is, of course, more than just voting. It should mean taking part in some influential group such as the PTA, a good government committee, a citizens' committee for influencing officeholders for whatever purpose the teacher holds as significant; and it should mean joining a political party.

The first step in becoming active politically is to register with one of the political parties. Once this is done, it is necessary to attend those meetings which one can. The importance of clubs and neighborhood political organizations has long been held in this country and seems to show little sign of declining. To hold active membership in such organizations is a step closer to the decision making within the party.

Most parties never have enough persons willing to serve as committee people or precinct captains. Such a role is a natural prerequisite to becoming a ward or township chairman or, later, a county or city chairman. Such activity is often a logical requirement to the party's endorsement as a candidate for some office. I was a committee member in the Democratic organization in Wilmington for eighteen years and a member of a neighborhood club for six years before I was supported by the party to run for the legislature. Since 1958, when I was first elected as a Representative to the General Assembly, I have been reelected twice. This year I am the party's nominee for the State Senate from my area.

Through all of this there is the obvious problem that a teacher is the employee of a political organization, the school board. Perhaps it is ethically not proper for a teacher to be a member of a school board which employs him. Some

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We are going to need also to provide for more assistance to teachers. The supervision and consultation service of the past will no longer carry the burden either of local in-service education or of curriculum development to say nothing of the many kinds of help teachers will want for classroom implementation. Of course, it is here that we can begin to look for the best uses of the specially trained teachers who have had a chance to learn more than the rest of us. We may need new patterns of consulting relationships besides the usual ones of demonstration or supervision.

Finally, we ourselves need to understand as fully as we can what is happening to us both locally and nationally. This present account is crude in its distinctions among the steps and phases in curriculum improvement and in the relationships among services. Its attempts to characterize local and national programs are doubtless on the primitive side. Probably the effort to identify the points of contact between local and national programs and to suggest a sequence for these contacts is also not as insightful as it should be.

Yet if we are to come through this period with credit, we should become as self-conscious as we can be at this moment. We must try to understand as well as we are able what is taking place so that we can participate in the process rather than merely accommodate ourselves to it. We have surmounted our anxieties about the ambiguities of the early national curriculum studies. Now we need have ambitions larger than merely to survive. Our aim ought to be to come out of this era with a stronger base for local curriculum development. We need to be abler in defining and meeting local needs as well as in making fuller use of proposals for improvement.

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may argue that a teacher should not be a member of any school board while serving as a teacher, but I am inclined to disagree. There is some merit to having a person on such a board who has firsthand knowledge of the problems. If a person is serving in another area, there seems to me to be little chance of a conflict of interest arising from such a situation.

As an employee of a political organization, it is possible in some areas that the teacher who elects to take part in politics—whether in pressure groups or in a political party—is leaving himself open to economic pressure. This can only be fought by expecting it to happen. As James Madison observed, if men were angels there would be no need for government in the first place. In anticipation of such pressure, methods can be taken to prevent it.

The chief means of rendering a teacher independent enough to take part in politics are tenure or civil service, membership in a professional association, the PTA and similar institutions which will (a) give the teacher an appeal if pressure is used or (b) cause any move against him to be made publicly. The potential publicity and embarrassment from either situation are the main lines of defense from economic pressure by unscrupulous politicians.

To make sure the representative system does not have a detrimental blind spot, then, teachers should take part in some political activity. Because of their training they should recognize—without falling into the sin of pride—that the training they have received means they have something special to offer. One reason for political activity is that, seen

close up, the American politician is today not nearly as corrupt or stupid as he seems in the fantasy of the frustrated whom we often allow to paint a picture of what we should go and see for ourselves.

There are many reasons ranging from selfishness to a sense of responsibility which suggest that the teacher should be inside the caucus room when the door is closed. It is not easy, but it is perhaps a primary responsibility.

Private—Public—Fuller

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education would depend on the amount of tax funds for private schools and necessary reduction of services in the public schools.

Our elementary and secondary public schools would be left to educate children from denominations too small to operate their own schools, the unchurched, the culturally deprived, and the rejects and problem students from the private schools which can choose their own pupils. Adding tax funds and private funds for schools segregated on the basis of religion, race, social status, wealth and special interests would seriously affect the public school as an effective educational agency in thousands of American communities. Its educational programs would necessarily be lean, its students and teachers could scarcely be expected to achieve high standards, and its community support for facilities and funds would be on a charity basis from the community power structures whose members would ordinarily be patrons of their own private schools.

Most serious would be the religious, social, political and economic divisiveness that would follow. In Holland almost

the total of society is organized along the lines established in the three school systems. It is divided into Catholic, Protestant and neutral clubs, civic associations, political parties, merchants' groups, labor unions and trade associations. In this country the splintering of society would probably be even more serious because of the great size and diversity of our country and its people. The minority public school with its underprivileged clientele could no longer be an effective force for unity. It could itself become as divisive in many ways as the denominational and other private schools at a time when its great unifying function would be needed as much as at any previous time in our national history.

The Federal Danger

The federal government is today moving into a position from which it could undermine the fiscal base of the public schools within a few years. This might be done through categorical as well as through general laws to lessen the constitutional risks. Once large federal funds have been made available to the states to match and distribute, with both private schools and public schools eligible under federal law, federal financial incentives and internal political pressures on the states promise to become irresistible in making private schools eligible for full tax support along with public schools. Thereafter, as soon as a number of states have been led to amend their state constitutions to permit state matching of federal funds for private schools, the next step could be the short one of a requirement in the federal law that private schools must be included as eligible under state law before any state can qualify to receive the federal matching funds for either public or private schools.

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