

THE PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Teachers' Salaries

IT IS most deplorable that, under the influence of the present economic stress in Virginia, from some quarters should come the suggestion that the salaries of public school teachers in Virginia should be reduced. In a democracy such as ours there is no activity—not even roads—that so influences the present lives and future of our people as the effectiveness of its system of public education. Children have only one opportunity to be educated, and to deny them this opportunity is to place a serious handicap upon the next generation. It is a well-recognized truism that “as the teacher, so the school.” The public school system can get along with mediocre equipment and buildings, but never can it make progress with poor teaching. A reduction in the present extremely low salaries of teachers can mean only one thing—a reduction in the quality of the teaching force. There are some arguments against reducing teachers' salaries. I think of the following:

1. The average salary paid to public school teachers in Virginia is extremely low when one takes into consideration the fact that teachers, to qualify for teaching in the state now, must have at least two years of college work in order to meet the minimum requirements.

2. The total salary of a teacher paid for seven, eight, or nine months of work must be divided by twelve in order to secure the average monthly wage throughout the year. The teacher has very little opportunity to secure employment during the vacation season. This unemployment is not a situation of the teacher's making and the teacher has to live during these months as well as during the months of employment.

3. In times of economic depression, there is no advantage in reducing the salaries of workers in any line if the reduction can be wisely avoided.

4. A large majority of the teachers of Virginia, even with very low salaries, are

helping to carry along families and dependents as well as themselves during these troublous times and a reduction in their salaries will simply result in a lessened ability to help those who are dependent upon them for assistance.

5. Teachers, in general, are not subject to the operation of general economic laws of opportunity and advancement in times of prosperity.

6. Teachers have been accustomed to believe that their relatively meagre salaries are more acceptable because they are not subject to fluctuation in times of depression as are the incomes of those workers whose compensation rises and falls with corresponding variations in general economic prosperity.

7. Any worker in the public service of the state should either be protected by some retirement system or else should have a wage sufficiently large to allow the worker to live comfortably and make some provision out of his own savings for old age. At the present time, there seems to be a practical collapse of the present pension system provided for teachers, and the teachers must be prepared either through their own earnings to provide a retirement system for themselves or else to save a portion of their income for the eventualities of old age.

8. The greatest danger in such a proposal, however, is one that we hope will not occur, even though the reduction in salaries is put into effect. Teaching is not a public office that carries with it great honor and distinction. Teachers are workers seeking to gain an honest living through rendering a valuable service and doing it with the greatest possible degree of efficiency and faithfulness to truth and honor; we sincerely trust that, however great the temptation may be, teachers will not lose any of their ideals of service because there is a feeling that the public at large and those who support public education and receive its benefits are not appreciative of their efforts.

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