

## THE LITTLE RED SCHOOL- HOUSE: A QUOTATION

*Schools dependent on a general property tax—which Professor Seligman calls “the worst tax known in the civilized world today”—can never function completely. They must be supported by taxation on wealth, wherever it may be.*

**T**HIS winter is the worst in the history of public schools. At least a quarter of the children are attending schools where the length of the term is half what it should be.

In Ohio there are schools that did not open at all, and others that were open for only seven or eight weeks before the first of the year.

Schools in Wyoming will be open for only three or four months. Three years of drought is drying up education there as it has dried up the crops.

In Alabama last year the schools all over the state averaged only one-third the usual term, affecting all the children enrolled.

In Kentucky many schools were closed a month and opened on shorter terms.

In New Mexico schools closed from two weeks to four months early last year, and have even shorter terms this year.

Oklahoma is not at all sure how long it can keep its schools open. This is but a fraction of the sorry roll call.

What a lifetime handicap this loss of school time may prove to the several millions of children affected! The boy who should have entered high school at fourteen will be sixteen or seventeen when he finishes the eighth grade. The chances are that he won't go on with his schooling at all. And to the Fond Fathers who feel that this can't hurt him, educators may point out that 85 per cent of those listed in *Who's Who in America* are college bred, while less than 7 per cent did not advance beyond the eighth grade!

Think what closed schools mean to the small victims of the depression. At home they are hungry, cold, dismal, insecure. In the schoolroom they look for warmth, cheer, activity, companionship, and sometimes even a good hot lunch.

Consider what it means to 100,000 or so children released from the factories by the child labor provisions of the NRA codes. If they can't go regularly to school, what will become of them? The answer is hinted in one state prison survey. Among one hundred youths there was not one high school graduate.

Teachers' salaries have been reduced 20, 40, and in Michigan and Nebraska even 60 per cent. In some states more than half the teachers will not receive as much as \$400 for their services this year, less than President Roosevelt considers adequate for unskilled labor.

Teachers in many states are now holding unpaid warrants for last year's salaries, and in some places, for the previous year's pay, as well. In some instances teachers taught eight months, although they were paid for only two. The total amount of unpaid teachers' salaries now exceeds forty million dollars.

A teacher, even though needy herself, cannot see little children suffer. If the records of last winter were written, they would tell a noble tale of self-sacrifice. New York City teachers contributed \$2,500,000, often 5 per cent of their salaries, for relief work among their pupils. In Caspar, Wyoming, teachers are paying for children's lunches. Detroit teachers are giving necessities, from oatmeal to eye-glasses, books and shoes to the needy, and contributing their free time to investigating and aiding home conditions. The story is endless.

Still, a third of our children are being taught by men and women whose qualifications are sub-standard, whose pay is below

the subsistence level, and who are working against indefensible teaching conditions.

Approximately fifteen thousand more teachers were dropped from payrolls last year, and this year's casualty list has not yet been published. It will probably list the teachers unemployed at over 90,000. This has caused crowding of fifty, sixty, and even eighty children into classrooms designed for thirty or forty. In addition to lowering the scholastic level, such crowding greatly increases the dangers of epidemics, especially among under-nourished children.

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Even if we ignore, as most of us do, the shallow propaganda against "over-education"; even if we believe, as most of us do, that whatever education costs it is worth it, we must still take stock of the situation. Like a housewife with a reduced budget, we cannot get around facts. We simply haven't the money we used to have. We do have more children to educate. How are we going to give them healthy, adequate, educational nourishment on what we have to spend?

In the first place, how do we get our school funds? Not out of Uncle Sam's pocket! A school building may be a public work, but a load of coal to heat it is not!

Do we take our state taxes and divide them up, part for education, part for roads, etc.?

Not at all. We've been sending the children to school on the egg money! A general property tax, described by the most famous American tax expert, Dr. Seligman of Columbia University, as "beyond all doubt the worst tax known in the civilized world today!"

We don't have forty-eight school systems in forty-eight states. We have 127,000 school systems in as many districts. Because one tract of land is better than the next, some children get a better start in life than their friends.

Where a glacier a hundred thousand

years ago left a soil deposit that enabled men to carry on farming and industry to advantage, children today get a good education. Boys and girls who live on land which never had that enriching advantage—a hundred thousand years ago—are out of luck.

Because the state collects income taxes, sales taxes, inheritance, and corporation franchise taxes, and because the Federal government collects income, customs, and excise taxes, they can co-operate on huge road-building programs. In fact, we can build anything from battleships to little red school houses, with Federal and State money—but we cannot buy books and pencils.

The Public Works Administration will give a community 30 per cent of the money it needs to build a new school house, and lend it the other 70 per cent. But few districts have accepted the offer. They estimate that under the NRA specifications it will cost them 40 per cent more than if they build it without Federal help.

Most state governments have some small appropriation for education. Some states, such as New York, have an equalization fund which adds to the maximum a district can raise the sum necessary to meet the state's minimum requirements. This does not, however, relieve the poorer districts of excessive tax burden.

The obvious procedure is to tax wealth where it *exists*, and to spend it where the children *live*.—MAXINE DAVIS, in *McCall's Magazine*.

WELL, AT LEAST "DECIMATE"—

"A requirement that the applicant for admission to the freshman class must write, in a good legible hand, a three hundred word letter couched in correct idiomatic English, would, if honestly enforced, depopulate the colleges of the country."—HENRY S. PRITCHETT, *President-emeritus, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching*.