

"Public Schools"

By Unknown

FELLOW STOCKHOLDERS:

We are going to discuss, for a few moments, the greatest business enterprise in which you and I are jointly engaged. It is practically a new business, having been in existence, in a nation-wide way, only about seventy-five years. The world knew nothing about this business a hundred years ago, and some of our colonial fathers scoffed at it as something which, if it could be attained, was not worth the having. As a business, let us analyze it for ourselves, carefully.

A careful analysis is justified. For this business is one which has greater capital invested than any other enterprise in America. Tremendous amounts of real estate are owned. Great buildings house the shops. There are officers in every city and town in the country. An army of directors and workers is employed. Upon this business is spent the majority of our peace-time taxes. Into its factories goes the most precious material that our nation yields. Out of it comes a product, the value of which far exceeds our production of foodstuffs and manufactures combined.

This business, Fellow Stockholders, is the American Public School System.

The product of this "factory" is the education of our children - your boys and girls, and mine. Upon this product depends the future of America. We, as a people, invest more money in it than in anything else in which we are interested. The system is a corporation - and you and I own and operate it. When we consider that the high school enrollment jumped from 915,000 to 1,645,000 in eight years, and that only a little more than seventy-five years ago there were no high schools in this entire world, we begin to understand how gigantic an enterprise it is, and how rapidly it is growing.

It is from these points of view that we want to discuss the public school system. Your child goes through the public school - how does he come out? You pay more actual dollars and cents for the maintenance and upbuilding of the public school than you do for any other peace work that you are interested in as a taxpayer - what dividends do you get back? Your child is graduated from your high school - and what sort of a job does he get? More important still, what kind of a job does he hunt for?

We have the right of any stockholder to see what we are getting for our money. We are going to give credit for every bit of constructive work that enters into the product. We are going to charge every item which properly belongs on the debit side of the ledger. We are not going to admit that our efforts have been vain, these seventy-five years. We are not going to indict the management, except as we shall find ourselves wanting.

Let us begin our survey.

The community in which we live has invested thousands, hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of dollars, in our "plant." Yet that plant is idle more than three-fourths of the time. We admit that it should be idle a part of the time - perhaps a little more than half. But when the plant operates on a thirty hour a week schedule for only thirty-six weeks, is it just to say - as stockholders - that the idle time is out of proportion to the working hours?

We are not saying that the children and their teachers should put in eight hours a day, twelve months in the year. We are talking about our "plant" - the buildings. Are we using them efficiently? Someone may say that they are specially constructed, that they are not adaptable to the production of other things. Are we so sure? Could they not be so adapted?

Then let us consider the managers, superintendents, and foreman. They are the faculty. Assuming that they are proficient, how about the way we handle them? Would you permit half or more of your foreman and responsible officers to shift from one plant to the another every year? Would you expect them to be satisfied and happy in an environment where they were unable to become acquainted with their neighbors until the year was up, or practically so? Would you care to have a business in which all your skilled operatives were changing every three years? Yet this is what happens to your teachers. A large percentage of them shift from place to place at the end of the school year; they know little of the community in which they teach until the school year is ended. Does this kind of organization develop proficiency?

The recent War brought out the woeful lack of even the most elementary education in many young men of draft age, The percentage of illiteracy was found to be disgracefully high. Our government had to spend billions in training young men to understand and obey orders. We paid an immense price to give elementary education to these adults. Is it sound business sense to allow the next generation to come out of the schools as ignorant as these adult?

As good as our public school system is, we find that there is a tremendous economic waste in its administration. Viewed from a business standpoint, can we afford to let this go on? The Public School system ought in any balanced scheme of things to link up very definitely, not only with "Higher Education," but with the home, business, and community life. Failing in this, there is an economic waste. The percentage of business and professional failures is an index of our school system. The percentage of failures is too high.

No self-respecting citizen, no stockholder in this great corporation of ours, needs to be told that the ideals of educated men and women must more and more be made the ideals of all our

people. This is what we ought to mean when we speak of "Americanism." No thinking man or woman owning a share in this "Company" can fail to realize that the cost of education is a productive expenditure of money, that it will pay enormous dividends, and that in no sense of the word is it a charity!

It needs no argument to prove that the Public School is "Not" a place where political, religious, or educational "Axes" are to be ground! There should be no argument to prove that every one of us must understand and appreciate the value of the public service rendered by teachers. They should know us, and mix with us, and acquire a practical knowledge of the problems of life which we face, and which our children must face. And it is infinitely more important that we know the teachers into whose care we entrust our children. It is worthwhile, from a dollar and cents standpoint, for us to cultivate them, entertain them in our homes and make them feel that they are being relied upon, and that they can rely upon us!

We have spoken of "Americanism." What does it mean? What should it mean to our children? From this standpoint what are the real needs of the Public School?

"Americanism" means Equality of Opportunity," We live in no feudal age. There are no Barons or Lords of the Manor who hold us as chattels. Each man and woman is a human soul, entitled to a fair chance. Inevitably we are bound to each other by the ties of brotherhood, and the future of our America depends upon the growing of every boy and girl into a healthy, happy, competent manhood and womanhood, able to cope with the conditions that a citizen must face. Our Public School system should fit children to take advantage of their opportunities, and so make of themselves all that ambition and thrift and character may hope to attain.

Universal education, more than anything else, must be the goal of our republic. Upon this rest the foundations of government, for only through intelligent citizens can our government continue in the years to come.

The ban of factory production is returned goods - goods which have been improperly manufactured and are sent back to be worked over. Do we realize that there can be returned goods in our schools? Have we ever stopped to think that it costs as much to put a child through the same grade twice as it does to put two children through once? Everything which helps the child to learn quickly is real economy. Only if a child is healthy will he do the required work. Otherwise he will hold back his classmates as well as himself. Health becomes the greatest possible economy and if there were no other grounds for asking that supervision of health be exercised over all children, this would be enough.

Our Public Schools can succeed only in proportion to the cooperation which they receive from the community. We have spoken of effective organization. If this is demanded by the community, we shall get the worth of our money. If a community demands teachers who believe in public education at State expense, the demand will be supplied. If the people of a community are determined that American ideals shall be instilled into the minds of their

children, rather than the vamping of foreign agitators, the schools in that community will have truly American teachers.

In return for all this, the community must do its part. We must give the teacher a place among us. He or she must feel at home with us because they come into our homes. It is necessary for the teacher to know the home background of the child if intelligent direction is to be given. We cannot expect wholehearted work without some measure of appreciation.

How long since you have attended any school activities? The enterprises which the teacher promotes in order to show the child how to work with other children, fit him for the part he is going to play in mature activity, and are as important as the work of the class room. The success of these enterprises depends upon your support, not only from the standpoint of the money which is spent, but because the child will have faith in this instruction and will believe in its importance if we, as parents, show him that we also believe. These enterprises are the links in the chain which the teacher offers as a tie between the school and the community. The community must not lose hold of its end of the chain.

As individuals we have three ways in which we can become a constructive force for the betterment of the public Schools.

We can do it as voters, supporting measures which benefit the Public Schools, and voting against the measures which are opposed to their welfare.

We can do it by making our lives touch the lives of those directly connected with the schools. This does not mean working through a committee or an association. It means finding out for ourselves what the schools are doing. It means becoming acquainted with, and learning to know, the aspirations and the abilities of the teachers who guide the destinies of our children during school hours.

Finally, we can give our support as parents. The child is a healthy animal as a rule, and has very little natural desire for an education. We must show him that the way to success in the world lies down the long road of education. We must make this road reasonably attractive. We must show him the education is his greatest asset.

The Public School which brings together the children of the rich and the poor alike is the one great agency which makes for a responsible citizenship. Our children must know that the right to go to a Public School has been fought for. They must know what it costs in terms of money and sacrifice. We must realize that on the organization and influence of our Public School system depends the perpetuity of our Republic.

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