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Is the PTA Outmoded?

The Parent-Teacher Association has long been a fixture in most of the schools of the nation. Has it helped the schools? Has it hindered educators in doing a good job? Has the PTA outlived any usefulness it once had? Or is it still a beneficial influence in education?

These questions are almost always good for a lively discussion these days. We do not pretend to know the answers to them, but they are a legitimate subject for debate.

A recent issue of the Seattle Argus carried an article by Philip Bailey in which he calls for the abolishment of the PTAs. Give both the teachers and the kids a break, he asks.

BAILEY does not see the PTA as a threat to the republic, but says "The main objections to its continued existence are that it wastes a lot of time of both parents and teachers, and only further muddles an already confused educational effort." He adds:

"The teachers, of course, are forced to attend the gatherings, and in most instances must spend considerable time and effort in getting their rooms ready for periodic inspections. I have talked to many teachers about the PTA, and have yet to find one who thinks the schools would not be better off without it. In fact, the main objection to the PTA is the strong and not so subtle pressure exerted on the teaching staff. Woe to the teacher who does not cooperate, and no unorthodox or hanky-panky will be tolerated."

"We wonder if the cause of education would not be better served if it were left in the hands of professional educators, and let parents confine their activities to the necessary training in behavior, religion and morals..."

IN DISCUSSING this article with a parent of our acquaintance, we found her in partial disagreement—not with the thesis that the PTAs were not really useful, but because it was her experience that they tended to be used as "rubber stamps" for decisions of the administration.

Our own experience with the PTA consisted of taking out a 50 cent membership for each of several years, under pressure from youngsters, who in turn were under pressure to make the room "100 per cent," thus entitling it to a prize or recognition of some sort; and service on a PTA safety committee for a short time. (We DID succeed in having a traffic signal installed at a school crossing.)

We resented the pressures involved, and usually found the tea-and-cocky committee sessions just as fruitless as the full chapter sessions.

IT IS our conviction that parents sincerely interested in the education of their children—as opposed to such things as room prizes, tea parties and social chit-chat—would do better by visiting the classes their children attend, discussing problems personally with teachers and administrators involved, and in working with the children in an attempt to be helpful.

We do not deny—we cheerfully acknowledge—the PTAs have some real accomplishments to their credit.

But are the accomplishments worth the wheel-spinning, the pressures on children and teachers alike, the half-baked explanations of the "educational programs," the endless committee meetings, which are involved?

We are inclined to doubt it.

TEACHERS are gradually gaining status as a profession. More and more they are well-educated, intelligent, dedicated people, who are trained to do a job, and in most cases do it well. Would it, in Mr. Bailey's words, be better to leave education "in the hands of professional educators," and to concentrate on other parental duties and obligations?

Let each parent answer for himself and herself. Let the teachers answer, too. For, ultimately, we must decide if teachers are to teach, or if they are to be subjected to pressures, subtle and not so subtle, to conform and to present a bland and pleasant "image" to parents in general.—E.A.

On De-Twitching Vacations

"The dilemma of the American vacation... is that what is good for the vacation business is bad for the vacationer."

Resting in the quiet, ancient elegance of Dark Harbor, Maine, Russell Baker of the New York Times delivered himself of this thought recently. What he means is that a man seeking the surcease of a vacation should be able to be "a refugee from twitching America" who could find a place to "stand under the stars and hear his nerves sigh."

But, increasingly, vacation sites are paved with asphalt, decorated with neon signs, and catered to by a variety of hot dog stands, bars, souvenir-gimmick shops, and motels with swimming-pool and television.

OF COURSE, there is a "demand" for such things, Baker observes:

"Today's tourist dollar comes from the man with an outboard motor. He wants a motel with a heated swimming pool and an air-conditioned saloon and some place where he can walk around wearing diaphanous shorts and sunglasses without feeling that somebody's servants are smirking at him."

Still and all, one questions the real objectives of such a vacation, Baker adds:

"Somewhere, this country should be able to preserve a few (places) where the jangling American can ponder the mysterious quiet that was part of his heritage before twitching became the universal civic obligation."

"Bad for the vacation business? To be sure. But the (proprietors) will always manage enough to retire to Florida where they can learn to twitch in harmony with the rest of the country."

As for us, give us tall timber, a lake, a stream, or the unsullied ocean.—E.A.

"It Helps Pass the Time"



Communications

Letters to the Editor must bear the name and address of the writer, although under certain circumstances the use of a pen name or initial for publication is permissible. The Mail Tribune reserves the right to edit all letters with a view to clarification and condensation. Letters submitted for publication must not exceed 400 words. The letters printed in this column do not necessarily represent the views of the paper. In fact the contrary is often the case.

Teen-agers

To the Editor: I fully expected some response to my letter of Aug. 5, but was really surprised to hear from someone such as Glynndon O. Loomer, claiming indignation and an upset stomach all in one letter.

I admit that I erred in leaving the implication that all city police are incompetent. There are a few that are not, but very few, especially in this area.

There are also some very decent, well behaved teenagers, but they are becoming scarcer all the time.

Loomer's statistics giving the amount of officers as opposed to the population and area, are as ridiculous as his desire to be sick.

There could be 500 city police officers, and if the majority showed lack of responsibility and disinterest, then that amount would still be inadequate.

Loomer offers to wager that I've never taken any steps toward correcting any adverse situations. There again he is shooting in the dark. I did take such steps once, but never again.

I pursued and stopped a 17-year-old boy and signed a complaint against him, and had him brought before a judge. The charge was one of speeding on a residential street (55 m.p.h.). I was accompanied by a neighbor lady who served as a witness. The boy brought his father with him.

The judge stated in fact, that this boy had been the cause of many complaints over a period of time and after a very light tongue lashing, he was released.

His father then jumped to his feet, and threatened to swear out a complaint against me for speeding also. The judge informed him that this could not be done. (Why? I don't know.)

For some time after this incident, this little smart-aleck would drive by the house where I and my family lived, and make obscene gestures at me and the children. Should I have yelled for the police again? Not on your life!

And you, Loomer, accuse me of having an over-abundance of gall.

Get in your car some night, drive around, pick out a violator of curfew. They are thick as flies on honey. Swear out a complaint, then listen while Mama or Daddy tell you to mind your own business. Watch, while this same Mama or Daddy whip out a five or a ten-spot to pay junior's fine, (if there is one) then watch junior climb into his \$1,500 automobile and go racing on his merry way, calling you a square as he drives away. Then you can go home and really be sick.

G. L. Murray, P.O. Box 904, Central Point, Ore.

Picking Problems To the Editor: Mrs. Humphrey wrote of the pear picking situation in Sunday's paper. It seems there are several people in our valley who do not know the labor problem very well.

We do have a camp for migratory workers with farm paid transportation. It is not completely free since they must pay board and room the same as the Mexicans.

Pear picking (as has been said before) is not a woman's job. I've picked for years and been told it was too heavy. The ladders are no heavier than the buckets of pears. There is only about 1 in 50 women that have the stamina to do this type of work. And as to children in the orchards,

the day is too long to sit under a tree, to say nothing of the danger of trucks, tractors, trailers and ladders of the other pickers. It's a temptation to pick up cull pears and put them in mama's box. The water can make a delightful diversion too.

The number of Mexicans picking fruit has nothing to do with the number doing sloop labor. They are all recruited by the government according to the need.

As to discrimination, we hire the white pickers when we use Mexicans. In the first place it's the law, and anyway most of them only pick long enough to get money to go on to other places.

With six children, some of whom must be school age, the thing for Mrs. Humphrey to do is when school is out in the spring, head for the Willamette valley with her brood. They can all work all summer, through strawberries, cane berries and into beans, which lasts till school starts in the fall. Many places up there furnish cabins for workers, and that is definitely family work. They don't use Mexicans there either.

Hope this sheds a little light on the situation. By the way, I've been crew boss eight years now. That's what a picker gets if he works too long.

Velda Wilson, Route 4, Box 457-E, Medford

West Germany Influences All of Western Europe; Is Key to Many Future Decisions

By PHIL NEWSOM, UPI Foreign News Analyst. In a park-like setting in Bonn stands a three-story residence of clean, white lines and quiet elegance. It is called the Palais Schaumburg. In its walls are setting only the soldiers of the West German Republic standing at the gates give it the appearance of more than passing importance.

But it is, in fact, the official residence of the West German chancellor and from it to a degree which would have been deemed impossible 25 years ago radiates an influence over the decisions of every major western power.

It may be the force which determines whether President Charles De Gaulle of France decides to seek a second term.

It, more than France, will determine the future course of the European Common Market.

And in these days of cautious hope for a world more at ease with itself, the United States will take careful soundings of opinion at the Palais Schaumburg before proceeding further in any effort to reach agreement with the Soviet Union beyond the present partial nuclear test ban treaty.

For Germany is the prize of Europe, and remains as it has been through modern history the key to European stability.

For De Gaulle, who sealed his Franco-German accord with a kiss for Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, the course of events since last January has been a disappointment.

In the preamble to the accord approved by the West German Bundestag the Germans made clear their continued devotion to De Gaulle's own grand designs for Europe.

The German decision to become a signatory to the partial test ban agreement was over De Gaulle's opposition and led to laments in French newspapers that France now stands isolated.

In its agricultural policies for the Common Market and in its desire that Britain also be brought into the European community, West Germany also stands in stubborn opposition to De Gaulle.

And these are the conditions which may convince De Gaulle that he and he alone can guide France through the immediate years ahead.

In the years since the West German Federal Republic came into being in 1949, the United States carefully has nurtured West German public opinion.

A neutralist, or pro-Communist Germany could determine the fate of the whole of Europe.

Matter of Fact

By Joseph Alsop (c) New York Herald Tribune Syndicate

(Joseph Alsop will be on vacation this month—and gathering material both in this country and abroad for future columns. During his absence, top members of the staff of the New York Herald Tribune will substitute for him.)

By MARGUERITE HIGGINS, MADAME, WOULD YOU LIKE SOME POSTCARDS?

Saigon—The Xa Loi pagoda rises sharply from the otherwise drab streets, its peaks and inverted arches seeming as exotic and mysterious as the sound of gongs and chanting from the darkened interior. The large front gate was opened by brown-robed monks looking gaunt, stooped, and authentically ascetic. But once inside, the exotic mood was somewhat disrupted by the question (in French): "Madame, would you like some postcards?"

The questioner was a Buddhist layman running the pagoda's souvenir shop. He had a special bargain that day which was a series of seven postcards showing the most important steps of the self-immolation (the word "suicide" is taboo around pagodas) by fire of the late Reverend Thich Quang Duc, all for 70 piastres (about a dollar).

There were more surprises in store at the Xa Loi pagoda. This now world-famous pagoda is the command post from which the Buddhist Association, one of a number of rival Buddhist groups, conducts its anti-government agitation.

IN THE courtyard of the pagoda nearly every monk seemed deeply absorbed in a mimeographed sheet that was being handed out by an apprentice monk, a boy in his early teens. A Vietnamese interpreter was instructed to make polite inquiry of the monk about what he was reading.

It turned out that the monks were reading their press notices! The mimeographed sheets contained summaries of stories appearing in New York and Washington concerning the anti-government demonstrations by these Buddhists. The mimeograph machines at the pagoda are also busy preparing communications for the foreign press.

The almost immediate appearance that first day inside the pagoda of an English-speaking press spokesman helped complete the public relations picture. And finally the impression that Madison Avenue had crossed the Pacific to the Xa Loi was reinforced by the sight of a saffron-clad monk clambering to the pagoda's outer wall to harangue the crowds through a loudspeaker.

THE well-advertised quarrel between the Buddhist Association (other groups have kept aloof or disassociated themselves) and the government began over the right to fly Buddhist flags on holy days and demands for greater opportunity to acquire property. Violence erupted before President Diem officially ceded on these and nearly all other points raised. He did so in a joint Diem-Buddhist agreement signed June 16.

Then why the continuing demonstrations in Saigon and threats from the pagodas of more suicides? "We do not trust Diem's sincerity," said Thich Huyen Quang, a Buddhist leader from the religious center of Hue. But he was unable to furnish concrete examples of a governmental breach of faith in its agreement. Only a few days ago, the Buddhists again refused Diem's offer to let them join with the government—in the presence of foreign correspondents and international observers—to investigate and remedy any claimed grievances. This refusal, the regime claims, shows that the Buddhists themselves feel that their grievances are too insubstantial to stand the light of inquiry.

In two days of talking with monks at the Xa Loi and Giac Minh pagodas, this correspondent was repeatedly asked one question: "Will not world opinion force Ambassador Lodge to change his policy toward Diem?"

AT THE same time the monks insisted that the "real place to see persecution was in the countryside. The senior monk at the Giac Minh pagoda said that the Catholics not only held all the best jobs in the provinces, but that in one particularly bad area (Quang Ngai) Buddhists had been taken to jail and burned alive because they refused to let themselves be converted to Catholicism.

Quang Ngai province is far north of Saigon and distant therefore from the frenetic rumors which not infrequently have taken in honorable diplomats as well as honorable Buddhists.

In any case, inquiries in Quang Ngai about the "burning of Buddhists" or arrests of any kinds for religious reasons brought astonishing denials. The queries were put to the American sector advisor, the Buddhist sector commander, Buddhist leaders at the Quang Ngai pagoda, the Catholic province chief, and peasants in a half-dozen villages. The Buddhist sector commander—Col. Le Lan—was of the view that Buddhists probably held a majority of the posts in the province, including those at the village level.

ALL of which goes to show that you cannot judge Vietnam by what "they say" in Saigon. For nowhere in the countryside, which is constantly being circled by State Department reporters assigned to do only that, is there religious persecution. As to Saigon, there is bitterness left over from police brutality in putting an end to recent street demonstrations. But if the Catholics were to take to the streets in illegal demonstrations defiant of the government, they would risk the same fate.

In Quang Ngai it was left to a Buddhist layman who followed the Americans to a hotel to come out with the most candid version of what the Buddhists are after in this campaign of refusing to let old grievances die. "I understand from Saigon," said the Buddhist conspiratorially, "that Mr. Lodge is going to get rid of Diem as soon as he arrives. That is why they are keeping trouble alive—so that American opinion will stay aroused. But in Quang Ngai there is no religious problem. Saigon wants us to make a fuss. But what would be the use? There are no reporters here to tell the world about it."

The Buddhist looked incredulous when the Americans expressed doubt that Mr. Lodge's mission would include the hiring and firing of Vietnamese government personnel.

Strictly Personal

By Sydney J. Harris (c) Field Enterprises, Inc.

PERSONAL PREJUDICES One sure way to detect the true expert in any pursuit is by his unfeeling courtesy and consideration toward those less skilled than he; it is only the second-rater who is brusque and contemptuous toward the duffer, it is only the person who is not sure enough of his prowess to be charitable and forbearing.

Children who are not trained to do what is right for its own sake (rather than out of fear or promise of reward or because "it's the best policy"), will sooner or later escape by doing what is wrong for its own sake—and this is the meaning of so much "senseless" delinquency by adolescents.

Habitual critics of an established order are generally the worst people to reform that order, for, as Burke pointed out long ago, "those who are chronically employed in finding and displaying faults are unqualified for the work of reformation; because their minds are not only unfurnished with patterns of the fair and good, but by habit they come to take no delight in the contemplation of these things."

It is foolish to say that men and women should marry for love; everyone marries for love—and if what he loves most is money or position or security, then this is the love that the marriage is based on.

The fastest way to break up a "disarmament conference" would be for one side to accept the proposals of the other—this would create such consternation that negotiations would have to be broken off, for all such proposals are based on the tacit understanding that they will not be acceptable.

A small town or a village is a unit, a city is not; a city is really composed of many smaller cities within it, and the inhabitant can freely choose which of these smaller cities he will move in; and it is this freedom of choice that, despite its manifest disadvantages, makes a big city so appealing to so many people.

The best way to estimate the nature of any group's miseries is to study carefully the nature of their pleasures; what they are running toward tells us what they are running from.

To communicate to others the knowledge that he possesses is only part of the task of a writer; the more important part is to communicate to himself what he does and does not know, and in the very act of expressing himself he works toward clarity and cohesiveness in his own thoughts; writers who seek only to persuade rarely develop their own minds.

"Women have two weapons—cosmetics and tears," Napoleon once remarked; but this formidable armory was placed in a proper perspective by Philip Preston, when he added, "Lucky for men that the two are scarcely to be used with advantage at the same time."

When a man tells me he walked seven miles to school as a boy, I can understand why he learned boat trips all the way from Grants Pass to Agness.

Bert Kissinger, 322 South Riverside, Medford.

In the Day's News

By FRANK JENKINS

Defense Secretary McNamara, who seems to have a pretty good head on his shoulders, told the U.S. Senate that the United States, with TENS OF THOUSANDS of atomic warheads, is MANIFESTLY SUPERIOR to Russia in nuclear power and would run little risk in ratifying the test ban treaty.

He added: "The limited test ban would SLOW Soviet nuclear progress and PROLONG U.S. nuclear superiority."

WHY? It's a bit technical. But here is the gist of his argument:

RUSSIA'S lead in the MONSTERS resulted from America's CONSIDERED DECISION against concentrating on such bombs. He said "horror weapons" of the 100 megaton (100 million tons of TNT) type, which Russia can develop, have doubtful military utility compared to the smaller megaton weapons which the U.S. can launch now with precision and in vast numbers.

HE PUT it this way: We just don't think the monsters are THE THING. They are too unwieldy, for one thing. (If your enemy had nothing but a cannon and you had plenty of men with rifles, his armament would be so unwieldy that you could pick him off and get rid of him before he could get his huge cannon into action.)

It was for that reason, he said, that we turned down the idea of monster bombs. We think our immensely greater number of smaller bombs are more efficient.

The members of the Senate are reported to have listened with close attention to Secretary McNamara's testimony.

FROM armament, let's turn to inflation.

Brazil has been having plenty of inflation trouble.

WHY? Well, the Brazilian government spent TOO MUCH and taxed TOO LITTLE. When a government spends too much and taxes too little, inflation follows in the course of time.

IT GOT pretty bad in Brazil. It got so bad, in fact, that the Brazilians had trouble finding places to carry their paper money. At first, the dispatches tell us, they solved the problem by using brief cases instead of wallets. That took care of the situation for a while.

But, as more and more money was printed by the Brazilian government (in order to have something to pay its bills with) even the brief cases got too small. So the people took to carrying their money around in bundles wrapped in newspapers.

THEN—Somebody up at the top had a brilliant idea. Just print bills in BIGGER DENOMINATIONS. That doesn't take any more paper. It doesn't take any more ink. Just make the figures bigger. Thus, instead of having to carry around sacks of little bills the people will have only one BIG bill to bother with. Isn't government finance wonderful?



"Throw-away bottles... soft-top cans... pop-top cans... no wonder we're all outta condition. You make life too easy!"