

Politics: The Hallmark of American Public Education System

Politics In the Appointment of *School Teacher*

So far as the appointment and retention of teachers are concerned, the whole foundation of evil is broadly covered by this unblushing declaration of a San Francisco school director : —

“I was brought up in this town, and of course have a certain number of friends who want and expect positions. Each director appoints his own friends and relatives, and their names are never questioned by the elementary committee, nor by the full board when it meets to elect candidates. That is a courtesy which is extended by every director to each of his fellow directors, — the minority, of course, excepted.”

My own experience is that school committee men act upon the same principle in New England as in California, though they are less outspoken about it.

The evil influence of the appointment of teachers by means of “pulls” does not appear so much in the character of the persons appointed as it does in the demoralization of the body of teachers. It removes a strong incentive to personal improvement. If appointments depend on “pulls,” so may promotions and transfers. Each teacher feels secure in her position as long as she has a friend who has influence, or who is on friendly terms with some one who has it. It has several times happened to me that teachers who have been admonished of some neglect, mistake, or inefficiency have gone to their friends for protection, instead of avoiding danger by trying to do better.

Critique of the Committee of Ten Report on Education Reform in 1893

Because they did not examine the schools in the context of society at large, Eliot and his associates failed to evaluate the direct role of laymen and politicians in the schools

The first of these was political control. As long as school budgets and teacher appointments were tools of the politicians, no major reform was possible. Teaching certificates were granted almost at whim; in 1893 no state protected its children from obvious incompetents or political hacks. The Committee of Ten, however, blithely ignored the entire issue. It preached to colleges and to teachers, but failed to address the real force behind most American schools: the politicians.

Politics In the Selection of School Textbooks

The effect of politics on the teaching force has already been discussed. Favoritism and irresponsibility were common, undermining academic standards. At a time when textbook publishers were engaged in a ruthless fight for markets, one observer reported that "the acquisition and loss of positions by teachers and officers is often determined by their opinions of certain text-books."

Example

"Pulls" affect chiefly two matters, — the selection of textbooks and the appointment of teachers.

. . . . Of books whose sale is not large, — high school books, reference books, supplementary reading, — the selections have usually been made on the recommendation of myself and the teachers who are to use the books.

The case is entirely different with books whose sale is large and profitable, such as readers, arithmetics, geographies, grammars, copy-books, and spelling-books. The rival publishers' agents divide the committee into two or three hostile camps, and arouse an anxiety on the part of many of the school committee for the success of their side only less intense than the agents themselves feel.

The potent and at times not wholly unselfish interest of school-book agents in our teachers and school officers is no secret. That the acquisition and loss of positions by teachers and officers is often determined by their opinions of certain text-books, is generally conceded.

The Predicament of America's Schoolteachers

as pointed out by

William H. Maxwell, Superintendent of New York City, 1908:

He has been relieved of the rule of the clergy; too often he has found the thralldom of the politician. To gain place or promotion he has been obliged to pull political wires, to fawn upon men whom he despised, and to seek to obtain by influence what it was impossible to accomplish by merit.

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Again, lack of appreciation results from meagerness of pay and insecurity of tenure in office. Especially is this true in America, where commercialism holds far too wide a sway in every walk of life. A man with a very small salary will not as a rule wield any great amount of influence in the community, and particularly so when it is

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Politics Plagued the American Public Schools

was totally ignored by

The Renowned **Committee of Ten** Report (1893) that Called for Education Reform

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