Why Teachers Need A Union

By JOHN DEWEY

WASHINGTON, D.C. — As to why I am a member of the teachers union, the query that comes naturally to my mind is, Why shou'd I not be? Why should not every other teacher be?

I have found that the spirit of courage, straightforwardness, of energy, of practical idealism, a sense of justice for all who are in any way wronged or in danger of being wronged . . . is the animating spirit of the union; and I have been proud, if for no other reason, to be a member of the union, so as to be associated with the men and women who are conducting its affairs.

Why does one belong to a teachers organization of this type instead of simply to the other type?

All Interest

There is need for a working, aggressive organization that represents all of the interests that teachers have in common, and which, in representing them, represents also the protection of the children and the youth in the schools against all of the outside interests, economic and political and others, that would exploit the schools for their own ends, and in doing so, reduce the teaching body to a condition of intellectual vassalage.

If the teachers today, especially in our larger centers, are not in the position of intellectual serfs, it is due more, I am confident, to the energetic and aggressive activity of the teachers' unions than to any other cause.

What would be the condition of the laboring men and women today if there were no labor unions?

Great Tragedy

I don't mean simply the condition of the people who are in these unions, but the condition of labor generally. One has only to ask the question to know that we should be then contemplating a great tragedy.

The very existence of teachers unions does a great deal more than protect and aid those who are members of it; and that, by the way, is one reason the teachers union is not larger.

It is because there are so many teachers outside of it who rely and depend upon the protection and support which the existence and the activities of the union give them, that they are willing to shelter behind the organization without coming forward and taking an active part in it.

Come Forward

And if there are teachers . . . who are not members of the union, I should like to beg them to surrender the, shall I call it, cowardly position, and come forward and actively unite them selves with those who are doing this great and important work for the profession of teaching.

It is said that the teachers unions as distinct from the more academic organizations overemphasize the economic aspect of teaching.

Well, I never had that contempt for the economic aspect of teaching, especially not on the first of the month when I get my salary check.

Grocery Bills

I find that teachers have to pay their grocery and meat bills and house rent just the same as everybody else.

I find that the respect in which they individually and collectively are held in the community is closely associated with the degree of economic indepence which they enjoy.

The teachers union has also been a constant and aggressive force in combatting the efforts of various organized interests (that do not meet simply for academic discussions) to exploit the schools for thir own ends

Outside Forces

These outside forces that like to use the schools for their own purposes are both more numerous and better organized than the general public is aware of . . .

And have not the teachers an interest which is possibly less pecuniary and economic, a broader and more humane social interest?

If they have, why is it not merely their right, but even their duty and responsibility, to organize to make themselves effective in securing the interests which should be closest to their hearts?

Too Academic

If our programs of study in our schools are still too academic and too pedantic, too remote from contact of life, it is largely because the educators, administrators and the teachers are themselves so far remote from the actual problems of life as they are met by the great mass of the population.

PRESIDENT WILLIAM H. Simmons and George Wiley, executive director of the National Welfare Rights Organization, at a rally of teachers at the U.S. Capitol calling on Congress to provide adequate funds to meet the needs of the students.

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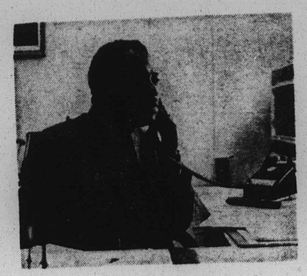

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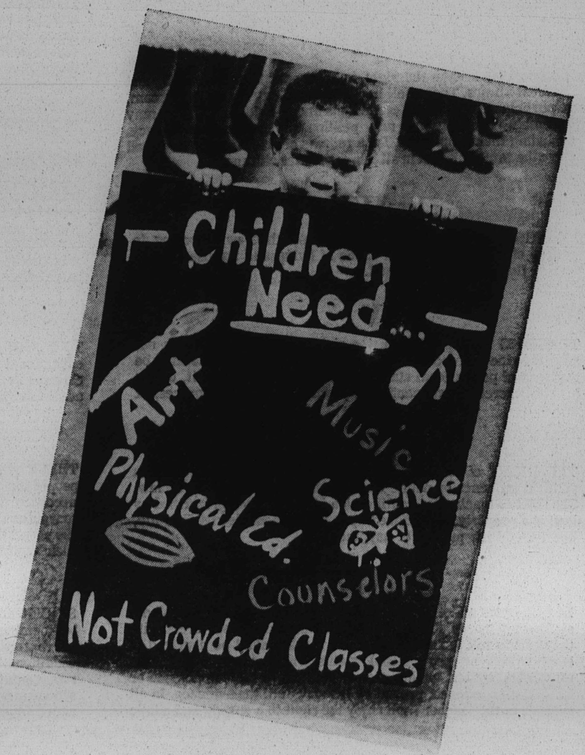

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