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SCHOOLS AND ROADS

While Virginia's public school system languishes in the depression which threatens sixty-two counties with school terms of less than a minimum of eight months, the State road program advances into the present fiscal year with a normal amount of funds and automobile taxes continue to hold their own in the face of declines everywhere else in State revenue sources.

This situation is sheer anomaly. Here we see two of the central government's chief functions operating at widely divergent levels and entirely because road funds are segregated and schools must be supported out of the general fund.

The problem is really deeper than a question of schools and roads. It is really a question of general fund activities versus activities supported from these segregated accounts which, it must be recalled, have grown far beyond what the framers of the original law ever expected.

With the growth of receipts from automobile taxes there has been an almost proportionate decline in general fund receipts - especially those from the tax on railroad gross receipts. Time was when the traveler rode the trains and as a result paid money into the general fund of the State. Now he uses his automobile and pays the tax into a segregated fund for a highly specialized service. Unless he falls within State income tax levels, this motorist citizen pays nothing directly to the support of general fund services which he enjoys.

Here is the key to the school situation; namely, that segregated funds in Virginia have gradually been drawing money from the general fund, and the State begins perforce to look for additional sources of revenue with which to carry out functions as important, if not more important, than the building of roads or the regulating of traffic on the highways.

To say that motor vehicle revenues should be used solely for the benefit of highway users is to argue that income tax collections should be spent by the State solely for the benefit of citizens with larger incomes. The State is a political and social unit and should not attempt to limit its services solely to those groups who pay the taxes.

The time is here now for the General Assembly to take stock of its central government tax structure and to guard against the mushroom growth of specialized services at the expense of other and equally important services.

What has been the occasion for Governor Pollard's economy order which has reduced the purchasing power to State employees to bare necessities and, in several departments, threatened the continuation of a minimum of service? Certainly not a decline in motor vehicle revenues. The occasion for this extreme economy program - which, incidentally, is open to serious doubt - is the falling off of general fund revenues.

State taxes must be considered as a unit and the services rendered by the central government should be regarded in the terms of their social value. To select from these services a single one and build a legal fence around it is bad government to the degree that such discrimination harms other activities to which the government is committed.

As matters stand at present, Virginia is ready to proceed on an annual road program with practically the same amount of money she had for such a purpose in 1929, whereas the public school system, lacking only \$700,000, must face the year with the assurance that 62 per cent of her localities will be unable to provide even a minimum term of school.

Does this mean that roads are more important than a child's education? What answer to this question do members of the General Assembly have?

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SAVE THE SCHOOLS!

Whatever may be said about the virtues of economy and balanced budgets, the estimate of the State Department of Education that at least sixty-two Virginia counties will have school terms of less than eight months during the coming session is sufficient to give pause to every Virginia citizen.

Of late years Virginia school officials have been talking in terms of a minimum program for elementary and secondary school, of improving the standards in these schools, and of giving equal opportunities to all the children of the Commonwealth to receive an adequate common school education. But in the face of this commendable effort to meet the needs of our schools, Governor Pollard's 30 per cent reduction in general fund appropriations has actually thrown the schools backward.

It becomes increasingly apparent that something must be done to save the schools from this threatened blow to their work. The State's aid to schools in the present fiscal year is, under the executive order, to be reduced by \$2,103,127.50, and yet \$700,000 would make it possible for these sixty-two counties to keep their schools open for a minimum term of eight months.

According to Governor Pollard, the responsibility for this reduction rests with the General Assembly which passed the 1932 appropriations act. Legal opinion elsewhere contends that the Governor was given discretionary power to avoid a deficit by making such reduction.

The letter of the act may be to force such destructive economy upon the schools - but what member of the 1932 General Assembly will admit that it was his intention even implicitly to endow the Governor with such power?

It is simple truth that the school system faces a crisis. Something must be done, and if not by the special session, then by the regular session just as soon as it convenes in Richmond.

It appears that the localities are doing the best that they can and that it is the State's aid which is being seriously reduced. Other departments have, of course, been affected, but not to the degree that the schools have.

School officials have repeatedly called attention to the fact that the education of children cannot be delayed. Governor Pollard himself expressed these sentiments to the Governors' Conference in California recently; and George C. Peery, the Democratic nominee for Governor, has taken a stand favoring the minimum educational program as formulated by the State Board of Education.

The members of the Virginia Legislature need to ask themselves these questions: What will it profit the children in sixty-two Virginia counties that will have to close their schools shortly after Christmas, if nothing more than a balanced State budget is to be our boast? What will it profit Virginia to fail in the minimum education for several thousand children in order that \$700,000 may be saved a State whose credit is second only to that of the Federal Government?

These questions answer themselves. And if adequate education for the youth of this State means anything more than empty talk, then Virginia's schools must stay open the full eight months' term in the coming session, irrespective of the vain satisfaction on either the Governor's or the Legislature's part in ending the biennium without a deficit.