

Future of Education In Hands of Citizens, Says Noted Educator

Editors note: Mrs. Warren has a wide background in various educational organizations and was president of the Michigan division of the American Association of University Women. She was also chairman of the Michigan Citizens Commission on Educational Policies and is a member of the six county study of Community College Needs in Metropolitan Detroit. Here is her report on an address given by Dr. James B. Conant to PTA members, school boards and school administrators at Michigan State university last week.

By MRS. NEIL E. WARREN
Special Writer

"The future of public education in America will be determined by the interest manifested by citizens—especially leading citizens," Dr. James Bryant Conant told the newly organized Michigan Citizens Committee for Better Schools in East Lansing last Friday.

Speaking to the committee members and their guests who

represented Parent Teacher Associations, school boards, and school administrations, Dr. Conant placed special emphasis on the role of the citizen in the improvement of our public schools.

"We can have the best schools in the world," he said, "without making any radical changes in the basic pattern of American Education." Citing the number one problem as that of getting good school boards, he characterized a good school board as one made up of honest, intelligent citizens who know the difference between policy making and administration. "This is a difficult difference," he pointed out.

"The difference between policy making and executive action is a fine line, but it must be firmly drawn."

IN DEFINING his role, Mr. Conant said that a school board is obligated to ask the most searching questions of the administrative officers, but must not tell them how to run their work.

"The responsibility of the school board," he said, "is to get the facts; facts about the kind of general education required of all students, facts about the amount and kind of ability grouping, facts about what courses the academically talented students elect beyond the required courses, and facts about the requirements for graduation."

To those who would pattern American education after that of Russia Dr. Conant said, "To compare the educational system of a totalitarian country and that of a free country is to compare things of incomparable magnitude. To compare European and American education is to compare social situations so different as to make it absurd."

HE SUGGESTED that if we were to try to pattern our educational system after that of the European systems we would have to begin with these major changes: abolish all four-year liberal arts colleges, abolish undergraduate work in the universities, establish uniform entrance requirements and professional degree requirements, change laws concerning youth labor, abolish all local school boards, and make the American people reshape their whole thinking of society and American education.

These drastic changes are not needed, he said. "All we need is good school boards, good administrative staffs, good teaching staffs, and the intelligent backing of citizens."

Dr. Conant expressed great confidence in well organized, well intentioned citizens groups. He warned against vigilante groups that tend to become small pressure groups in education.

These often draw to them citizens who have opinions about a wide variety of educational matters, but their ideas are polarized by limited personal experience and lack of understanding of the complexity of the problems involved.

DR. CONANT'S long interest in the work of the National Citizens Committee for Better Schools (formerly the National Citizens Commission for the Public Schools) has been supported by his belief that such organizations can help citizens groups put their local problems and observations in proper perspective and enable members to become better acquainted with the issues with which they are dealing.

In the balance of his talk Dr. Conant reviewed some of the major findings of his study of 11 American high schools. He emphasized those points which have been covered recently in the series of articles in The Birmingham Eccentric.

Following Dr. Conant's talk, Mr. Henry Toy Jr., president of the National Citizens Committee for Better Schools spoke to the group about citizens committees in other states.

HE NAMED three underlying principles for an effective citizens committee: (1) it must be representative of the population, geographically, politically, economically, sociologically, and philosophically. (2) it must work closely with established school authorities; and (3) it must work with facts and base recommendations on facts. "A good citizens committee is fact finding, not fault finding," he said.

With these as guiding principles, the Michigan Committee for Better Schools appears to have started in the right direction. Its membership consists of seventy-five citizens who have demonstrated interest in public education.

An advisory committee of twenty professional educators and members of the legislature has been appointed to work with the committee.

Mr. Louis J. Berman, editor of the Whitehall (Michigan) Forum and member of the National Citizens Committee for Better Schools is acting chairman. Elmer White, of the Michigan Press Association is acting secretary. The committee will meet early in May to elect officers and adopt by-laws.

Complete MSU Traffic Course

Four police officers from the Birmingham-Bloomfield Hills area completed a special five-day traffic course March 25, on the Michigan State University-Oakland campus near Rochester.

Those attending include Patrolman Donald R. Moonen of the Birmingham police department, Patrolmen Robert G. Randall and George R. Crisman of the Bloomfield Hills police department, and Patrolman Ray F. Wilcox of the Bloomfield Village police department.

The course, which covers traffic laws and ordinances, is one of a special traffic series for Michigan police officers sponsored by the M.S.U. School of Police Administration and Public Safety.

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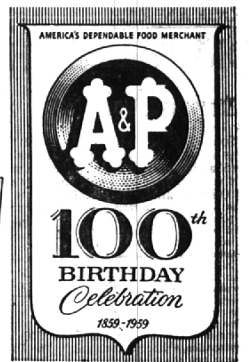
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