

THE FARMERS' PROSPECTS

A welcome air of optimism permeates the annual report of the Secretary of Agriculture. He is of the opinion that good reason exists for believing that the worst of the farmers' plight is over and that "from now on" gradual improvement may be expected. There is very little ground for doubting the accuracy of this prognostication, and every one hopes that it will be more than realized.

To the bringing about of the unsatisfactory agricultural conditions that have for so long prevailed many causes contributed. Foremost among them were the general unsettlement due to the world war, increased freight rates, the production of big crops at high cost, the failure of foreign markets to absorb the American surplus and unemployment in many manufacturing industries with its inevitable corollary of lessened power to buy foodstuffs. It surely is not unreasonable to hope that as these causes one by one disappear—as some of them are already beginning to do—there will be a corresponding improvement in the condition of the tiller of the soil and that Secretary Wallace's vision of a new agricultural era will come to pass.—Washington Post.

TAXPAYERS WILL NOT FEEL BURDEN

LEGISLATURE ADOPTS FITZ-HUGH'S PLAN OF FINANCING SCHOOLS

President State Board of Education Explains To Governor Ritchie.

DR. HENRY M. FITZHUGH  
Westminster, Md., Nov. 28, 1921.  
Governor Albert C. Ritchie,  
Annapolis, Maryland.

My dear Governor Ritchie:

At the time of discussion of the school budget in your office last Wednesday, you stated that the money raised by direct taxation is by law dedicated first, to the bonded debt requirements of the State, and secondly, to the schools. The information then developed the fact that public education is the only State activity that is supported principally out of the directly levied tax, and that the institutions caring for the sick, the indigent, the criminal, the insane, agriculture, higher education, etc., are supported by funds raised by indirect taxation. Later you asked me if I thought that the public would stand for a ten-cent raise in the tax rate in order to carry out the proposed program of the State Board of Education. The implication carried by this question was, I take it, that the demands of other State-managed social activities would so reduce the general fund that the schools would be obliged to go directly to the people for additional money. I have, since leaving your office, been considering the status of the school budget under the existing method of providing funds, and it seems that the situation, which possibly might embarrass the Executive, the Legislature, and the school system is substantially this:

Everything but bond and school requirements is provided out of the fund raised by indirect taxation. If, after everything else is provided for, any money remains in the general fund, that money goes to supplement an amount raised by direct taxation for the support of the schools. The schools then are sustained from two sources, both variable. The first source, namely, the general fund, contributes a small proportion; and the second source, namely, the direct tax, a large proportion. The first source is not under the close scrutiny of the taxpayers; the second, because it is on the tax bill, is at all times under the critical scrutiny not only of the taxpayer but of the politicians as well. As both sources of income vary, and as the first is by custom and law the one that supplies the other social activities of the State, it naturally follows that the schools, by reason of being the residuary legatees, so to speak, are forced to levy taxes in direct proportion to the degree of expansion that the necessities of the other organizations demand. When the schools, in order to meet the demands of progress, are forced to fall back on funds derived from direct taxes they are in position to be attacked by the uninformed public as being extravagant and as the sole cause of the increased tax rate. The first source depends on and varies in proportion to the needs of other activities; the second depends on and varies with the experience, inclination, and sense of expediency of those who decide at any particular time what the rate is to be.

Now there are some features about the school system of the State that are, perhaps, occasionally lost sight of, but which by reason of their importance must be recognized:

First: It is in direct touch with a majority of the families of the State.

Second: It deals directly with about a quarter of a million children and is under the most critical scrutiny of their parents.

Third: It is a means provided by a democracy to produce and maintain such a constantly rising level of intelligence and information as will insure a progressive

improvement in the general character of our national life.

Fourth: It employs seven thousand persons who to a very large extent influence the fundamental thoughts and characters of a quarter of a million children during the most impressionable period of their lives.

Fifth: It is the only institution charged by the State with a universal compulsory obligation, namely, that of compelling the attendance at school of the children between the ages of seven and seventeen years, regardless of the sex, color, social position or financial status of the parents; and most parents send their children to the public schools.

With the foregoing in mind, as a member of a Board the function of which it is to represent the people in the matter of public education, to see to it that the school facilities are adequate, and at the same time sensible, uniform and progressive, I wish to protest against the method by which the schools are financed because it seems to be poor state policy to permit so fundamental an obligation as the education of children to remain in a less secure position as regards its revenue than are such other activities as the care of the sick, indigent, the criminal, the insane, agriculture, higher education, etc. The present method in effect discriminates against the schools in favor of all other social activities that are assumed by the State and financed by the public purse.

I protest then:

First: That it seems to be poor State policy to so arrange for the financing of one fundamental activity, i. e., the school system, as to make it appear to the taxpayers that its necessities are the principal cause of increased direct State taxation.

Second: That it seems to be poor State policy to so arrange for the financing of an institution.

1. Whose work is vitally fundamental.

2. Which is in direct contact with the majority of the people.

3. Which employs seven thousand professionally trained people of high grade.

4. Which is operated for the sole purpose of promoting the social efficiency of our people.

5. Which is now responsible for the instruction of a quarter of a million children.

6. Which is under the direct scrutiny of practically our whole population, and

7. Which provides a service the acceptance of which is compelled by law, as to require it to be the only contender for money raised by unpopular and generally opposed direct taxation, and the last to benefit by money raised by generally invisible, unfeared, and popular indirect taxation.

Third: That it seems to be poor State policy to so arrange for the financing of the State educational system as to have it depend on two variable sources of income, one of which diminishes in direct proportion as the demands of other activities increase, while the other depends directly on the experience, inclination and sense of expediency of those who have the power to decide what the direct tax rate shall be at any particular time.

Fourth: That it seems to be poor State policy to so arrange for the financing of one fundamental State aided social activity, i. e., the State educational system, as to cause it to constantly irritate the sore and sensitive pocket nerves of the taxpayers, while all the other State aided social activities subsist on proceeds derived from the taxpayers who are obtunded by the anesthesia of indirect taxation.

And I suggest:

1. That it might be better State policy to so arrange for the financing of the several social activities that each one, in the exact proportion that it shares in the total State income, be ratably represented in the direct tax levy.

2. That it might be better State policy to have the average taxpayer realize what proportion of the State income supports each State activity. (The average taxpayer has but little thought and knowledge of the fact that two-thirds of the State revenue is derived from indirect taxation, and is of the opinion that public operations are generally supported by the direct tax that he pays each year. This impression, while uncorrected, is the impression of the majority of our people, and it follows that the average taxpayers who now believe that the State income is synonymous with the proceeds of the direct levy, feel that the schools are absorbing over 40% of the State revenue, when, in reality, they absorb less than 20% of it. Therefore, the average uninformed voter feels that public education is an unduly expensive institution and until this misapprehension can be corrected, he will be unwilling to give the support that the schools require.)

The above is submitted with a full realization that this is one of your busy times, but I think you will, perhaps, agree that the importance of the matter of the relative costs and responsibilities of the State-aided social activities from the direct tax point of view, and the equitable and ratably distribution of the general fund, justify our attention.

Yours very truly,

(Signed) HENRY M. FITZHUGH,  
President State Board of Education.

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Stewart Ellis, individually, and as  
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Saunders, and Vera Saunders,  
Plaintiffs,  
vs.  
Mary G. Ellis, et al.  
Ordered this 6th day of December,  
1921, by the Circuit Court for St.  
Mary's County, Maryland, in Equity,  
that the Special Auditor's Report and  
Account, made and filed in the above  
entitled case, be ratified and confirmed,  
unless cause to the contrary be shown  
on or before the 2nd day of  
January, 1922; provided a copy of  
this order be inserted in some news-  
paper published in Saint Mary's  
county once a week for four successive  
weeks before the said 2nd day of  
January, 1922.  
JOS. M. MATTINGLY, Clerk.  
True Copy—Test:  
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