

## SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHING CIVIL GOVERNMENT

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THERE are at the present time several hundred history teachers in the State of Indiana teaching to several thousand pupils in the public schools of the State the elements of politics or civil government. These teachers are, and will be held, largely responsible for the citizenship of the next generation. It is claimed, and it is perhaps true, that no cause has prospered less in the last century than that of good government. The recent transition from monarchy to democracy, necessitating the elevation of the most numerous class of the people from the lowest place to the highest in society, is no doubt partly responsible for this comparative lack of progress. Science, it is pointed out, has in this same period of time developed a body of technical knowledge and skill, so far beyond the grasp of the average man that experts are required in all of its various fields of activity. Its latest move has placed an agricultural expert in charge of the schools of each county, and a psychological expert in charge of the State Reformatory. No city council now undertakes to build streets, sewers, waterworks, or other utilities without the aid of a civil engineer. Society in city, county, and State has placed all questions of hygiene and health in the hands of medical experts. The churches and schools are administered by experts, specially educated for a special purpose. In short, society has turned over to experts about all its various fields of service, except the field of government. The ordinary education of the ordinary individual in the ordinary schools is not sufficient for any of the ordinary social services, usually called professions, except that of governing, the most difficult of them all. It is not strange that the work of most of our officers seems crude and blundering. It is the work of the inexperienced against that of the expert.

Attempts have been made to introduce expert service into the government. Controllers have been appointed by city councils; attorneys,—city, State, and county—are often employed, but in almost all cases the offices have not been properly safeguarded and are soon filled by persons of no better ability than those who employ them,—an expert office filled by an untrained officer. People who would not tolerate an untrained teacher, preacher, or physician,

will not only tolerate an untrained officer but defend him. In the former cases there is a definite attempt to secure the best possible service, while in the latter there is no such effort.

The remedy for this state of things does not lie in the direction of abusing our officers. They are just as good as the rest of us and no better. There is the trouble. The physician is a better physician than the ordinary man; the lawyer is a better lawyer; and so with the other professionally trained men. It will do no good to turn out one blunderer and put in another. The remedy for this lies in and through the public schools, the churches, and the press. When the public is brought to see clearly the value of expert service in government it will be just as impatient of the unskilled officer as it is now of the unskilled physician or engineer. It will no longer stand for the ordinary or unskilled service. The fundamental condition of better government lies in the direction of better education, and consists largely in a wider intelligence. The philosophy that reform comes only through education is as old as Erasmus, and is as sound as it is old.

The problem then takes on the double aspect, of the need of a better education and of a wider intelligence, if such a distinction may be made. History is not an old subject in the school curriculum. For many years after it obtained a position it was merely a handmaid to the classics, and consequently limited to the history of the classical nations. It is entirely probable that the more one knows about classical history the less he is fitted for becoming a modern government official. Statecraft was almost the reverse in classic times from what it is hoped to make it at the present day. Governing was a profitable business in those old days, and as such was plied by a favored class. People were governed for the benefit of the governors—king, tyrant, senate, city or whatever the governing power happened to be. The same idea underlies sinister forms of government to-day, such as are referred to by the terms "ring rule," "boss rule," "invisible government" and the like. Most of our present day "grafters" work along the lines of classic models. The idea of profit permeated classical politics just as it still does that of many people to-day. This change of view concerning the duties of government officials will come only after long teaching, preaching, and writing. The history teacher must do more than anyone else to bring this about, but he cannot do it all. It must be definitely recognized that an official is selected for office on account of some expert service he is able to render society, and not that so-

ciety may confer some favor on him. Short of this as a foundation in public opinion we cannot hope for the best government. Some writers have wrongly stated this: Government is still carried on as formerly for the benefit of the governing class; but since the governing class is a majority, government must do what is best for the majority. Such an idea might have done for the Italian cities of the Middle Ages, or may do for the Spanish republics of South and Central America at present; but it will not serve for the cornerstone of an enlightened State. Such a theory will lead to a continual struggle for the control of the government that it may be used for the benefit of the continually lessening number that will control it. This whole matter is a question of ideals, and an unskillful or ignorant history teacher in this work is just as much of a calamity to a community as a health officer who does not know the source of typhoid fever.

So much for ideals as a basis for civil government. Now what can be done in a more positive, direct way to make the future citizens more intelligent concerning government? One of the worst features of our political situation is the custom of carrying national issues and party organization over into local elections, so that instead of electing capable officers we are primarily concerned in electing Democrats or Republicans. The writer has in mind a young foreigner who, for political reasons, was put on the ticket and elected road supervisor. He had an idea that the ditch that drains the road should be in the center of the roadway, especially on the hills. As a consequence, the roads of the district were ruined. In the same county for a similar reason a clerk of the circuit court was elected who was unable to write a legible hand, but who made \$8000 out of the office, without himself making a single record. A young high school graduate did all the official work of this officer at \$50 per month. The stress of our partisan campaigns often sweeps such incompetents into office. Occasionally such a one is found even in the State House. These things will continue to happen so long as we over-emphasize national history and national civil government in our history teaching. Our State history is entirely ignored in the schools. The name of our State is, I think, mentioned once in our State text, and then in a footnote. Until quite recently in all schools, and still in most schools, all the time devoted to civil government was devoted to the national field. Political history, political management, partisan politics, organization and conduct of national parties—these are the topics that loom up large

in most recitations. The impression is left, if it is not openly taught, that this is a government by parties, that parties are necessary. So long as this phase of civil government is over-emphasized in public schools and in most of the newspapers we may expect party regularity to be a creed with most of us. Party regularity has a worse influence on local government than the spoils system, its offspring.

So long as science concerned itself with beautiful theories alone, such as the nebular hypothesis, gravitation, the laws of planetary motion, evolution, and the like, so long it remained a subject affected indeed by the cultured but ignored by the common people; but as soon as science showed the farmer how to kill potato bugs and mosquitoes, to raise \$300 horses, and run automobiles, the scientist came to be an important personage, in demand everywhere. So far then as the history teacher is a teacher of civil government, he must follow the example of the scientist if he wishes to make himself useful to society.

The place then, manifestly, for the civics teacher to attack the problem of civil government is the first place he meets it; the method is the method of science, the laboratory method. If he is in a city, the city government is the thing to study first; if in a town, the town government; if in a district, the township and county government. A little experience will convince him that the officers of a city government know no more about the problems of city administration than they do about the problems of the law or of medicine. The boundaries between city, township, county, State, and national administration are not clearly marked, and no attention is paid to them unless some one from partisan zeal makes an encroachment, as in the metropolitan police law or the county or township local option laws. These are then made a party issue, and we hear more or less about local self-government and centralization. Even then it is so interwoven with partisan politics that little is accomplished in the way of an intelligent understanding. The civics teacher can take up these questions with his classes, and by using the city government as his laboratory or object lesson make considerable headway toward an intelligent understanding. The work of the present State Board of Public Utilities will offer an excellent opportunity for a study of State interference in city government. A like study can be made of the police and State courts, of the State's attorney, of the township trustee in his relation to the city in his

township, of the county government in relation to the city or cities in the county.

It should be observed here that any captious criticism of persons or policies by a school teacher is entirely out of place and will not be tolerated by any community. The laws, the officials, and the offices must be studied as the honest expression of the people's best judgment. Confidence in our form of government, in its essential justice, in its ability to solve finally all problems that may confront it, is the necessary attitude of the public schools. Anything else is incipient anarchy. This does not mean that the teacher is not to point out other ways of doing things or to explain how they are done in other places. Personal criticism, questioning of motives or honesty, are however to be left to the newspaper, the pulpit, or the forum. The teacher must not make the mistake of using the newspaper as a textbook. A newspaper that is worth anything as a textbook would be worth nothing as a newspaper. The officer, the law, the records, the courts, the council, the convention, the election, the registration, the light, heat, and water plants, the street building, the library, the picture show, the theater, the church,—all these forms of social activity in their normal condition are operating in the immediate neighborhood. Those in charge of each will be glad to have the sympathetic teacher and class come on a visit. Teachers of geography, botany, geology, physiology, agriculture, long ago laid aside their didactic texts for a guide book or manual, and took their students direct to the objects they were studying. The realities of civil government are always more available than those of any of the branches above named. No one of them offers the opportunities for study by observation that civil government does, and yet little advantage is taken of this fact by the civics teacher.

In hundreds of visits with classes ranging in numbers from three to two hundred I have never met with other than courteous treatment. But by all means take the children of the public schools to study the normal, healthy social activities, not the abnormal or morbid forms. Those again are to be left to the newspaper correspondent and social settlement worker. The township trustee, the mayor, the judge, the prosecutor, the policeman, the county chairman, the auditor, the editor, the preacher, if rightly invited—any of these will visit your class room or welcome you on a visit to his place of business, and explain his duties. Before a visit of this

kind, make out a list of questions for the occasion, so that the purpose of the visit will not be lost in the excitement of the occasion. Collect maps, and make others, showing voting precincts, councilmanic districts, water mains, sewers, townships, commissioner's districts, road districts; locate factories, saloons, churches; note the prices of real estate in the different parts of the city, and discuss the reasons for the variations. Note the influence and location of railways and street car lines.

This means work; but remember that the scientist had to take off his coat and finally come out in overalls before the people took him seriously.