

OUR INEXPENSIVE



Schools



BY ALMA WOHLGEMUTH

TAKE \$230 — what could you do with it? Rather, what *would* you do with it? Buy a fur coat, or venetian blinds, or a television set? Or would you use it as a down payment on a bigger car, a finer house, or a trip to the Virgin Islands? Naturally, \$230 wouldn't take you very far on such ventures; but that amount has been paying for one child's education during one school year in an average public school of our nation. And still the opposition to the raising of school funds is overwhelming.

The city of Pittsburgh is an example of an area which recently registered such opposition. Two cents a day would have been the average home owner's additional tax in that city if the citizens had not voted down the proposed tax increase on October 6, 1953. In these days of inflation and threats to democracy and rising school enrollment, 34 per cent of the voters went to the polls and voted four to one against raising any more money for the schools. The other 66 per cent

stayed away and let them do it.

Pittsburgh is the city which is modernizing its downtown section by constructing skyscrapers, city parks, and miles of beautiful drives. At the famous "Point" rise gallant structures of aluminum and glass that dazzle even a twentieth-century visitor accustomed to dazzling sights. But Pittsburgh has nothing like this for its children. This is the city which is still using a school building built before the Civil War. Another of Pittsburgh's school buildings is 85 years old, and several others have passed the age of 75. One building was condemned recently because it was in imminent danger of collapsing.

The Pittsburgh School Board tried to improve the situation, but because its members are appointed, not elected, they have no power to levy taxes. As property tax for school purposes in Pittsburgh had been frozen in 1940 to a maximum of 11 $\frac{3}{4}$ mills, the board appealed to the state legislature to go above that maximum, but legislators threw the

problem into the laps of the people. A referendum vote was authorized. The ultimatum of October 6th was the result. The voters, who rarely have an opportunity of expressing themselves directly on any kind of tax, voted a great big NO to a raised school tax. That is, the ones who voted said NO. The 66 per cent who stayed at home didn't say anything. Apparently they weren't interested.

IT HAS been suggested that the vote was a general reaction to taxes, rather than an expression of hostility toward schools. Others who would defend the vote of October 6, refer to mysterious "hidden taxes," which they say are already paying much into the school fund. Anyone who cares to read the report of the Board of Education can very easily bring these taxes out of their "hide-outs." Per capita tax (\$5 per person per year) brings in 7.9 per cent of the school revenue, while mercantile, personal property, and miscellaneous taxes each add a still smaller portion to the school fund. A sizable amount is donated by the state in the form of a subsidy. But the greater portion, or 52.3 per cent, of the tax comes from real estate.

What happened in Pittsburgh is happening all over the country, only not so dramatically. Usually the general feeling of opposition has become such a well-defined undercurrent of hostility that the situation is prevented from coming to a head.

So far, very few areas have had such a challenge as the one faced in Pittsburgh. That city had a chance to get its feelings down in black and white. The record is there for the world to see. Economy in Pittsburgh obviously starts with education. But what is not clear, not only to Pittsburghers, but to most of the nation's people, is that "economy" on school costs is not economy at all.

Let us see how much of the school cost is borne by the average taxpayer in that area. There the school tax on a house with a sales value of \$10,000 is now \$117.50. Assessments are based on 53 per cent of the sales value. If the increase had been voted, the owner would have paid eight dollars a year, or two cents a day more. That would not cover the cost of educating even one of his children. Does the average taxpayer really have cause for complaint?

Yet grumbling is the order of the day when tax notices appear. I remember Jim Selby's reaction a few weeks ago. Jim is a good fellow, an ordinary guy trying to support a family of four on a \$3,500 a year salary. He does have a time making ends meet.

The day the school tax notice arrived, Jim was tired and cross when he came home from work. When he picked up the day's mail, he certainly didn't get any happier. He knew he was bound to get those bills sooner or later, but that didn't diminish his exasperation.

"What's this?" he yelled. "School taxes up ten mills! We can't pay such taxes! Somebody's going to have to do something about this! What good are we getting out of our schools, anyway?"

THE EVENING was filled with snortings and complainings until his wife made up a budget that showed him the year's expenditures for other things, and opposite that his tax bill. After that, Jim was silent. He spent the rest of the evening smoking thoughtfully.

Yes, the money that is now being put into education is pitifully small compared with what we are putting into almost everything else. It is on national record that even less than \$230 is being spent each year on each child in certain areas. It is pretty generally known that the record of liquor and tobacco sales amounts to three times as much as the money that is being put into education. Also, expensive cars, expensive furniture, smart clothes, homes equipped with complete, up-to-date modern fixtures and furnishings, run into the thousands of dollars, while education is a mere \$230 per child.

Consider Pop's salary. It has been going up for the last ten years. In 1940, when Pop's income was added to that of millions of others, the national income was found to be about \$81 billions. Ten years later it had more than doubled, having risen to \$239 billions. Dur-

ing those ten years, however, the percentage spent for education had been dropping. A little over 2 per cent of the national income was going into education in 1950, while the price of everything was going up.

That means that the cost of education was going up. In a little over ten years the price of a gross of pencils went from 70¢ to \$1.63. Book costs tripled. In Pittsburgh, coal to heat the school buildings went from \$3.70 a ton to \$8.40. All other school supplies everywhere in the country went up accordingly. It costs something to operate a building where the children spend almost half of their waking hours. It costs more now than it did before inflation began. Yet a smaller per cent of the national income is there to help pay the bill.

At the same time that the supply of money available for education is shrinking, the school population is expanding. Last year in the nation's elementary schools alone there were one and one-half million more children than in the year before. It is estimated that by 1960 there will be 10,000,000 more children in schools than there are today.

Almost anyone can point at present to a school where children are attending half-day sessions in order that they may attend school at all. More common than the half-day session is the overcrowded classroom. In a National Education Association survey of 526 urban districts repre-

senting all types of areas classified as to size, it was shown that over two-thirds of all elementary pupils were in classes in which there were more than 30. People don't have to be educators to know that there is greatest opportunity in a class which contains no more than 25 pupils. Yet even in more privileged districts, overcrowding is the rule. Until enough money can be raised for school purposes, overcrowding will continue to rob our children.

Large classrooms and short sessions have been accepted by our people for a long time, and many, even the intelligent persons, have given the situation little thought. They have been loud in their objections to taxes, but silent about school conditions. But listen to what expert psychiatric opinion gives us—Dr. Benjamin Spock, of the Western Pennsylvania Psychiatric Institute, professor of Child Development in the Bureau of Psychology at the University of Pittsburgh, said:

"Any district which allows itself to have classrooms housing 40 children is contributing to the problem of the general trend toward juvenile delinquency."

Dr. Spock was referring to a problem which should really cause the taxpayer some concern. Two hundred and thirty dollars looks small when it is considered that to catch, convict, and imprison a delinquent for three years costs as much as a high school and college

education combined. At the present time everyone is paying three times as much for crime as he is for public education. To give the schools a chance to help adjust this situation there must be time to give each child more personal supervision. This can come only through smaller classes and more classrooms.

Proof that delinquency is rising is seen in the report that from 1948 to 1952 it increased 19 per cent. Instead of the \$230 per pupil per year for education, the cost of placing each youth in correctional institutions is about \$2,500 per year.

WHAT do the taxpayers expect the schools to subsist upon? If the \$230 a year average cost per pupil is divided by 180, the number of days in a school year, they will realize that it now costs only an average of \$1.28 a day to educate one child.

President Eisenhower, in his State of the Union address in January, 1954, said: "Youth, our greatest national resource, is being seriously neglected in a vital respect. The nation as a whole is not preparing teachers or building schools fast enough to keep up with the increase in our population."

All over the nation there is anxiety about schools. Yet too often comes the thoughtless reaction:

"Thumbs down on a two-cent-a-day raise. We'd rather spend our money elsewhere."



We Don't Have Any Trouble Loving Them

BY DOLLY CONNELLY

THE PART-INDIAN child had an ugly record as an incorrigible runaway. He sat on the bed watching Mrs. Peter Hauser put his handful of possessions into order. At last she tucked a battered weekend case under his bed and turned to him, her big face gentle with understanding.

"You see, Terry, if you should run away from me I'd worry right through the night about you, wondering if you had enough to eat and were warm and snug. So we'll put this bag right under your bed, and whenever you take a notion that you'd like to wander, you just come to me first. We'll pack up plenty to eat and a jacket, and then I won't have to fret."

Young Terry never ran away again. Within two months Ella Mae Hauser, expert in the fine art of handling children of desperate circumstances, could add to Terry's page in her thick record book, "Adjusted — ready for permanent placement."

"Sometimes I believe the Lord

tells me exactly what to say to them," is her explanation of a remarkable record with more than sixty foster children brought to her interim home by the Child Welfare Unit of the Washington State Department of Public Assistance, the Juvenile Court, the police, sheriff, and Catholic Charities of Bellingham, Washington.

Home — even if it is a very bad one in which he is mistreated — is the very center of a child's security. Separation from it in the midst of family crises, or one of his own making, is a terrible experience. It is at this moment of emotional disturbance that the Hausers open their doors to children of any race, creed, or color.

The foster relationship is not a permanent one. A hundred variations of trouble can make it impossible for parents to care for their own children. Only a small quota of foster children are abandoned, or wards of a juvenile court which has decided that a change of environment is necessary to make good citizens of