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CHILDREN'S YEAR

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# BACK-TO-SCHOOL DRIVE

*"That no boy or girl shall have less opportunity  
for education because of the war."*

WOODROW WILSON



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Boys and girls, be patriotic! Enlist in a school to-day!  
Stay in school and train for the future!

This is the message which the Children's Bureau of the United States Department of Labor and the Child Conservation Section of the Field Division of the Council of National Defense are sending to the army of children in the United States.

### **INCREASING NUMBER OF CHILDREN LEAVING SCHOOL.**

Reports from all parts of the country indicate that an increasing number of boys and girls are leaving school for work. Although the work usually offers no training and slight prospects of future employment, the children are attracted by the extraordinarily high wages. The boys and girls themselves fail to realize that the present wage standards are the result of an abnormal condition and that after the war the untrained worker will have a minimum industrial value. Then as never before in its history, the United States will need trained and intelligent men and women to grasp the opportunities of the future.

In the words of the French minister of public instruction: “Double will be to-morrow the task of the pupils of to-day; twice as intense, therefore, should be their preparation for this task. \* \* \* Therefore, more than in time of peace, we should fight now against the obstacles in the way of school attendance. \* \* \* We must all do even the impossible in order that the children who will replace to-morrow the generation mowed down by the war may be perfectly well prepared for the duty imposed on them by the sacrifice of their elders.”

It is necessary to prevent now the reckless squandering of our most precious possession—the children of our country. It is most important, then, that the exodus of the boys and girls from the high and

elementary schools be checked if the United States is to meet the obligations it is now assuming.

The administration in Washington that is responsible for the conduct of the war has expressed the opinion time and again that there should be no falling off in school attendance because of the war. President Wilson, in a letter to Secretary of the Interior Lane, says: "That, in so far as the draft law will permit, there should be no falling off in attendance in the elementary schools, high schools or colleges, is a matter of the very greatest importance, affecting both our strength in war and our national welfare and efficiency when the war is over." He then urges that the people support generously their schools of all grades and adapt them as wisely as possible to the new conditions "to the end that no boy or girl shall have less opportunity for education because of the war and that the Nation may be strengthened as it can only be through the right education of all its people."

Secretaries Baker and Daniels point out that "so far as the Army and Navy are concerned, there is nothing more important than that the schools can do than to keep going at full capacity." Secretary Wilson says: "The children are our last reserves. There may come a time, if the war is long continued, when it will be necessary to lower the standards that govern the employment of young children in industry. That time, however, is not yet here. Until it arrives—and may it never do so!—the place of children is in school. There they will receive the equipment that they must have in order to do well the work of reconstruction that will be their task after the great war is over. If we are not to go down to defeat in the battles of peace, we must have an army of reserves who are strong in body, well trained in hand and mind. It is the children who are in school to-day who will see to it that their fathers and brothers who have fought and died in this war have not fought and died in vain. We must keep them in school and see that they get there the equipment they need for the work that is before them."

P. P. Claxton, Commissioner of Education, says:

"There are before us now as a people just two tasks: To win the war for freedom and democracy and, let us hope, for a righteous and permanent peace; and to fit ourselves and our children for life and citizenship in the new era which the war is bringing in. Both these tasks must be accomplished thoroughly and well, at whatever cost of money and effort and whatever sacrifice of ease and comfort may be necessary.

"When the war is over the call for men and women trained to help rebuilding the world will be insistent. To that end our schools must be kept going and our children must be enabled to avail themselves of

the opportunities they offer. The men and women behind the lines can find few opportunities for patriotic service that are more important than that of making possible the best and fullest education for the boys and girls who are to 'carry on' in the future."

For these reasons the Children's Bureau of the United States Department of Labor and the Child Conservation Section of the Council of National Defense are asking the local child welfare committees to aid in keeping the school attendance up to standard and to urge the enforcement of the child labor and school attendance laws throughout the country. The standards which we set up in peace times should be even more closely adhered to in times of war if the youth of our Nation are to be protected.

#### **CHILD LABOR NOT NEEDED IN ESSENTIAL WAR INDUSTRIES.**

In some parts of the country, however, exemptions from school attendance have already been made and because of the war, with the demand for labor and the high cost of living, there has been a tendency to lower standards. But it does not yet appear that children are needed in industry, even to secure the maximum output of war necessities. On July 12, 1918, the War Labor Policies Board, composed of representatives of all the departments of the Government directly concerned in the prosecution of the war, ruled that, through provisions contained in all contracts made by the Government, no child under 14 years of age should be employed on war work and that no child between 14 and 16 should be employed on war work for more than 8 hours a day, or more than 6 days a week, or before 6 a. m. or after 7 p. m. In the opinion of the departments immediately responsible for the conduct of the war, child labor does not promote the sustained efficiency in production which is necessary to keep the Army and Navy supplied.

This action means that the Government will not aid in placing even in essential war industries children who ought to be in school.

The United States Boys' Working Reserve at the third national conference firmly determined to safeguard the educational standards of the United States despite the temptation to throw the splendid boy power of the nation into industry without thought of future consequences. The Boys' Working Reserve refuses to give Federal recognition to boys employed on farms or in industry who are under 16 years of age. It maintains that children under 16 should be kept in school by all the pressure that can be brought to bear, on the ground that the future welfare of the nation depends on the educational training of its youth.

During the coming year the Boys' Working Reserve will provide junior counselors in the local branches of the United States Employ-

ment Service whose first duty will be to make an effort to return to school boys under 16 who apply for positions. If argument fails and the boy insists on going to work, the counselor will urge that he take only a position that is well suited to his future development. The counselor will also arrange, if possible, for the boy to take up a continuation course of study suited to the applicant's capabilities.

The Director General of the United States Employment Service, which is mobilizing the labor power of the country, has sent the following order to the Federal directors of all the branch offices of the United States:

The policy of the United States Employment Service is to discourage all children under 16 years of age from leaving school to enter industry.

In the placement of any child this service will conform to the Federal regulations with regard to the employment of children. In States where the age and hour standards prescribed by State laws are higher than Federal standards the policy will be to conform to the requirements of the State law.

If placing children in industry every effort must be made to place them in suitable positions and to investigate the conditions under which they will work.

(Signed) N. A. SMYTH,

*Assistant Director General, U. S. Employment Service.*

### **CHILD LABOR IS NOT NEEDED TO KEEP THE NONESSENTIAL INDUSTRIES GOING.**

Shall we allow the children to be sacrificed to keep the nonessential industries going? The Government makes no concession to non-essential industries. It gives the first claim on all raw material, on fuel, and on labor to those industries that are necessary to carrying on the war.

The Government can not afford to use men in the making of non-essentials, for men are needed for the successful conduct of war; and it can not afford to use children, for children are needed in the future to turn to account the victory for which we are fighting.

As a great English labor leader has said: "To those who say that an abundant supply of cheap juvenile labor is necessary to industry, we answer, 'Hands off the children. They are the nation of the future.'"

### **IS CHILD LABOR NEEDED FOR THE SUPPORT OF THE FAMILY?**

There are some persons who think that child labor is necessary for the support of the child or his family. But the earnings of a child who goes to work are in the long run a loss rather than a gain.

Premature work means a sacrifice of education, of health, and, as a result, of future earning capacity. No community can afford to rely upon its children to support widowed mothers or the invalid or

the unemployed fathers. Not as a charity but in justice to the child and to the future welfare of the nation, the community and not the children should assume this responsibility. Until the problems of poverty are adequately met by higher wages, by widows' pensions, or by other public provision, individual cases of special need will have to be cared for locally.

#### EXPERIENCE OF FRANCE AND ENGLAND.

England allowed her child labor and school attendance laws to break down just after the outbreak of the war, and children were excused from school in large numbers to work on farms, in mills, and factories.

Mr. Herbert Fisher, president of the British board of education, in speaking of the situation in England, says: "At the beginning of the war, when first the shortage of labor became apparent, a raid was made upon the schools, a great raid, a successful raid, a raid started by a large body of unreflecting opinion. The result of that raid upon the schools has been that hundreds of thousands of children in this country have been prematurely withdrawn from school, and have suffered an irreparable damage, a damage which it will be quite impossible for us hereafter to adequately repair."

The long hours and unsuitable conditions began to cripple the health of the children. The habit of shifting from one job to another, which is always one of the worst enemies of the child worker, greatly increased as a result of war conditions. The abundance of work and the abnormally high wages offered gave boys and girls a feeling of independence of restraint and induced habits of mischievous extravagance.

The chief medical officer of the board of education of Great Britain in his annual report makes the following statement:

"The increase in the employment of children has demonstrated beyond all question of doubt that many boys and girls are being spoiled physically, mentally, and morally—

"(a) By their too early enlistment in the ranks of the employed;

"(b) By lack of guidance in the choice of occupations suited to their physical and mental capacity; and

"(c) By inadequate opportunities to secure skilled training; and by insufficient safeguarding and husbanding of their physical powers and resources.

"However slight or temporary may appear to be the direct physical injury arising from such employment at the present moment, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the State is incurring a grave responsibility if it permits widespread employment of young people without adequate safeguards."

Our allies soon realized that children who leave school early to enter employment are "as assuredly maimed for all time" as the men who return wounded from the trenches; that the work they contribute in the fields and factories can not compare in importance with the education of the children. Steps have been taken in France and England not only to restore the restrictions in force before the war, but to raise the standards for the protection of the working child.

In August, 1918, the English Parliament passed the new education bill known as the Fisher bill. Mr. Fisher, in introducing this bill, said: "Economy is in the air. We are told to economize in our expenditures and foodstuffs. I suggest that we should economize in the human capital of the country—our most precious possession, which we have too long neglected." He later says: "We do not want to waste a single child. We desire that every child in the country should receive the form of education most adapted to fashion its qualities to the highest use."

The new English law requires that no child shall be exempted from school under 14 years of age, or before the end of the school term in which he becomes 14. The local educational authorities are given power, on the report of the school medical officer, to prohibit the employment of a child in an occupation which is detrimental to the child's physical development. The law further provides that all employed children between 14 and 18 years of age shall attend school 320 hours per year. For the first seven years after the law takes effect the compulsion is to apply to working children between 14 and 16 to attend continuation schools on the employers' time. After that period of time children between 16 and 18 years of age will automatically come under the act. This provision of the law will insure that the influence of the school will remain in the child's life during four critical years of adolescence, and that during those four years he will be under constant medical supervision. The law protects not only the city child, but also the rural child, who in this country has never enjoyed the protection of the child labor laws. Although this law does not go into effect until after the war, it is perhaps the greatest advance which could have been made at a single step.

In France the schools are being kept up under the very fire of guns. M. Forsaut, the inspector of schools in France, when advised that it was not wise to open schools in cities under bombardment, said: "So long as there are pupils, even if no more than a hundred, there ought to be schools, not only to enable the children to continue their studies, but to protect them against the dangers of the streets." The "schools of war," as they are called, were opened even within 1,200 meters from the enemy lines in order that the children of France might not be deprived of their education. The sessions are held in

champagne cellars and dugouts which offer almost absolute security. Ventilation is made possible by means of holes bored at intervals in the ceilings and communicating with the outer air; kerosene lamps furnish the necessary light. A recreation and gymnasium room is provided. The teachers attempt to decorate the rooms as best they can with pictures and flags. Often the teachers are obliged to live in the cellars as do also the children, so near are the enemy lines and so frequent the bombardment. Within a few months 16 such schools were opened near the fighting line, with an enrollment of 2,000 children. In these strange schools the children, who come sometimes from a considerable distance without thought of the danger, sing and recite their lessons under the constant threat of the enemy guns.

France has been especially concerned about the training of her rising generation. A vocational education bill is now pending which not only insures to all pupils some sort of preparation for their future work, but requires of all children who are past the age at which full-time attendance is compulsory part-time attendance at a continuation school.

The English and French have set us the example of unusual efforts in behalf of education. The new standards which have been set by the English and are being set by the French should enable us to attack the problem of child labor and education with a new inspiration. It is surely possible in this country to do as much or more than has been done in France and England where the pressure of war is greatest.

The Back-to-School Drive carried on by 11,000,000 women in the United States should undoubtedly help toward better enforcement of the child labor and compulsory education laws throughout the country; it should give wide publicity to the requirements of these laws and point out wherein the weaknesses lie; it may be expected to lead to better legislation in behalf of the school child and the working child.

