

Shall Teachers Affiliate with Labor

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The Board of Trustees has unanimously endorsed the following statement by Dr. Joy Elmer Morgan, Editor, the NEA JOURNAL. This does not mean that UEA is opposed to labor unions. UEA does believe that the profession should cooperate with labor and other groups on problems of common concern but without losing our professional independence.

SHALL teachers form unions and affiliate with labor organizations? The answer is emphatically NO—if teachers value the future of their profession and country. America is a land of many organizations in agriculture, business, industry, and labor. We respect these organizations and appreciate what they have done to advance their own particular group interests. But teaching is a profession and, of all the professions, holds the highest obligation to impartiality and universal service. Its task is to serve all humanity and to advance the general welfare. Its faith is in truth and goodwill rather than force.

Why are teachers urged to attach themselves to labor rather than to the *professional* organizations which have served them for a hundred years, patiently building teaching up to the standards it now enjoys? The arguments vary widely and are often tinged with expediency. Among them are these:

That America is in the midst of a great class war between labor and capital and that teachers belong on the side of labor. Do they? Are not teachers in our free public schools employed by all the people, paid by all the people, to teach the children of all the people, to foster the search for truth and good living without bias to class or creed or party? When they ally themselves with one group do they not violate their duty to society as a whole? Will not the results of such alliance be disastrous to the teaching profession?

That teachers are in desperate straits which justify extreme measures to get immediate results and that the big labor unions with their large memberships and their big funds can get these results. An occasional news report of a teachers strike might sometimes seem to justify this thesis. The hundreds of cases where intelligent cooperation between teachers and community brings even better results pass unnoticed. Teachers need to remember that recent industrial strife has engendered much bitterness and that a labor tieup can be a liability and actually hinder deserved salary adjustments.

That existing professional associations have done nothing for teachers—that they have even retarded the coming of adequate salaries. This is directly contrary to the facts. Our professional organizations were advancing the cause of education before teachers unions existed. Most of the planks in the platforms of teachers unions and the facts and figures used to support them have been taken from our professional organizations. The nationwide public sentiment on behalf of good schools, which is the background for any salary advance, has been cultivated by the NEA and its affiliated state and local associations. Our professional organizations are close to the people and are constantly working for higher standards of service and salaries. In some cases they have been overconservative. Their dues have been too small. They have not put enough emphasis on strong locals. But they are moving forward in a Centennial Action Program that goes far beyond anything that could be accomplished by affiliation with labor. Even in larger cities and industrial centers where teachers unions are largest, the same amount of money, time and energy used thru professional channels would accomplish more in the end.

Teachers unions are born of desperation and thrive on catastrophe. As conditions improve they will diminish, as they did after World War I. Even at their peak they have grown less rapidly than our professional associations. *Our National Education Association, with its affiliated state and local associations, is the only organization that unites or has the possibility of uniting the great body of teachers in this country.* Let us build for unity, not for division; for harmony between the public, the school administration, and the teachers, not for discord; for longtime ends as well as immediate gains; for improved service to children as well as increased salaries for teachers. We can do more for ourselves, for our country, and even for labor itself by maintaining our professional independence and by serving all the people.

JOY ELMER MORGAN