Organizing for Better School Legislation—D. C. Shows the Way

THE STRENGTH and effectiveness of any group depend upon the spirit of cooperation and determination shown by each member of the group, whether it is a small club of six individual persons or an organization worldwide in scope, as the United Nations Organization. This spirit can be realized only when each member of the group has an understanding of the problems facing his fellow members, a readiness to work with others in solving these problems, and a willingness to compromise when that is necessary. These essential factors give unified and dynamic power to an organization as it works toward its objectives.

In Washington, D. C., such an organization is the Joint Legislative Council. This Council is composed of thirty-nine educational organizations, representing twenty-three teacher and fifteen officer groups, and one secretarial group of the District of Columbia Schools. Each of the educational organizations has two delegates on the Council.

The one objective of the Joint Legislative Council is the furtherance of legislation which advances the welfare of the Washington Public Schools including improvement of the status of teachers and school officers. The Council acts in an advisory capacity, making legislative suggestions to the superintendent of schools and the board of education. And in the history of the Council, all recommendations made by it have been considered and many of these have been adopted by the school board and the superintendent.

By affording delegates from all educational organizations an opportunity to discuss legislative matters which concern the schools and school people, the Joint Legislative Council has become a meeting place for cooperative thinking, planning and follow-up action.

In the school year, 1932-33, the federal government passed the Economy Act, which prohibited a husband and wife from both being on federal payrolls. Inasmuch as D. C. teachers receive federal government pay checks, this act forced many married teachers whose husbands had federal positions to resign —a distinct loss to the school system. The Joint Legislative Council, with only ten educational organizations as members at that time, was instrumental in the repeal of that law.

With its seventy-eight delegates today, the Council scarcely resembles the small group which assembled in 1932-33. By 1940-41, the Council represented twenty-two organizations. Within three years there were thirty-nine organizations. Thus, more than three thousand teachers, and over two hundred school officers have a voice in the Council through their delegates.

As the Council increased in size and strength, it played a vital part in getting a $300 wartime bonus for teachers and officers. In 1944-45, the Council aided in the passage of permanent legislation which increased the salaries of all teachers and officers. Now, in the early months of 1946, the Joint Legislative Council has in its program proposals for additional salary increases and adjustments for an improved retirement plan.

By working together as a unified group, the Council has consolidated the strength of thirty-nine educational organizations. Thus, it is showing what can be done to improve public schools in the Nation's Capital. It is a type of organization which can raise the status of public education in other cities throughout the United States.

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