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Attitudes in Education By JOHN BURGER

[Partial text of conference address at Boston on July 3. The speaker is Director of Educational Services at General Mills. Formerly he was director of a Henry George School extension in Minneapolis.]

WHAT I hope to do here tonight, is to tell you some of the experiences we have been having at General Mills, with the idea that they may suggest ways to you of taking on additional duties that will prove rewarding.

Let me take just a few minutes to tell you why I'm with General Mills, and what I do there. We don't insist on the commercial, but I might just remind you that General Mills makes Wheaties and Cheerios and Kix. (Yes, I had my Wheaties this morning). Also Betty Crocker cake mixes and home appliances and Gold Medal Kitchen-Tested flour—to say nothing of sponges, vitamin products, and various industrial and chemical products such as monosodium glutamate, which improves the taste of whatever you are eating (if it isn't Wheaties).

About two and a half years ago, I was conducting the Rollin A. Stearns economic course sessions for supervisors in various businesses around Minneapolis. I went over to call at General Mills, and in trying to find business there, I found that they had business for me.

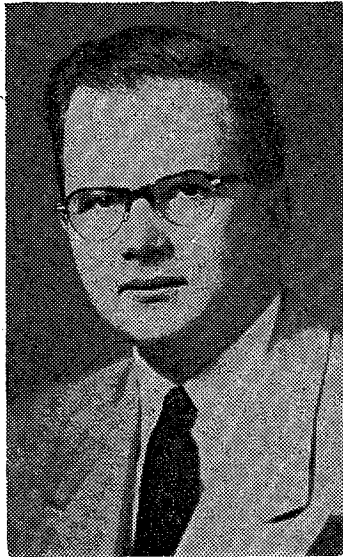
How It Started

General Mills people had the idea that not only in industry, but in the public schools as well, something was needed to get youngsters to thinking about economic problems. In other words, to get them to think in their impressionable years in terms of the concepts we believe make America great. Then as they grow up, their understanding can be enlarged by groups like your own, and by others that are continually throwing ideas before them. They will then be in a position to evaluate and grow up to be more literate economically than our present citizenry.

About two years before I got there, the company made an investigation to see how this might be started. By consulting teachers in public schools they had found that certain ideas seemed to crop up more often than others.

In our educational program we have taken ideas that we and the teachers think a youngster ought to understand, and have put them into the classrooms, in suitable language, format and media. We hoped that teachers in the fourth, fifth and sixth grades would take hold of them. This is the level at which, previously, very little had been done in the way of fundamental economic training, so we thought we would try to fill in that gap.

Early in the game teachers suggested that if



John Burger

General Mills wanted to do something why not take the story of bread, and work up picture panels that youngsters could look at in the classrooms.

So the story of bread was worked out in nine panels with three pictures on a panel. The top row of pictures, as you stood them along a blackboard rail, showed how bread was made in ancient Egypt. They portrayed how, with very few tools, little technical skill and very little power, the wheat was planted, harvested, milled and baked, all very primitively.

The center row of pictures showed how it was done in early America. Not much difference! In fact, things hadn't improved much in those four or five thousand years. The early Americans had a few more tools. They were using horses where they had used oxen before, but there were relatively few changes.

The bottom row of pictures showed the sequence as it is being carried on today. By comparing the ancient method with early American and modern American methods, the youngsters drew the conclusions that in the last hundred years there had been tremendous development in the use of tools, power, and skill. The teachers liked these and asked for more material. Film strips were used next.

Our first subject was specialization. There was a little dialogue that went along with the strip. Jane and Jack were the names used, and a boy and girl from the classroom read the dialogue. It could be stopped anywhere for class discussion. Following more experimentation a second film strip was developed. This showed how each person in the family is a link in a chain, and a strong united chain requires strong links.

The community was shown to be a link in the larger national chain, and the nation a still larger link in the international chain. The importance of free trade was stressed, along with the necessity for eliminating and cutting down artificially imposed barriers.

Our fourth effort looks a little like a comic book, but we don't call it that because teachers don't like comic books in school. In this eight-page booklet, entitled "Freedom of Choice," we took the story of Robinson Crusoe and extracted the things we found helpful in portraying the idea that an isolated individual has to make choices every day to determine what he is going to produce and consume. We

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Banner displayed on Boston's City Hall, signed by Mayor Hynes, in honor of visiting Georgists.

(Photo by Herb Lurio)

Attitudes in Education

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showed how when Robinson Crusoe didn't have freedom of choice, his living standards and enjoyment of life dropped off considerably, even during the time he was on the island where he was struggling to exist.

The second story in the booklet told of Swiss Family Robinson. This family, shipwrecked on another island, had similar experiences but a lot more fun, because they could specialize in their little family economy. There is a large element of excitement in these stories. I'll send more information about any of these booklets to you if you'll drop me a line—just John Burger, General Mills—don't call me John Hamburger or Cheeseburger. [Joseph Stockman had roguishly introduced the speaker with a play on words about a cheeseburger without any cheese and a hamburger without any ham, adding, "I've got the Burger here."]

We have printed 110,000 of these booklets and they have been used widely. We also developed some before-and-after tests. Interesting figures show that youngsters who used this unit had their economic understanding upgraded as much as fifty per cent. In other words, whole classes would do on the average fifty per cent better on the after-test than they did on the before test, which we thought was rather significant. Another thing we found was that sixth graders had the same understanding after they used this unit as did ninth graders who had not used it. That is, we accelerated by about three years, the understanding these pupils had about the significance of free choice.

No Advertising

General Mills doesn't advertise Wheaties or Kix or Cheerios or Betty Crocker products in any of these materials. This is purely a public relations function. We are simply trying to make our services, facilities and resources available in schools where something of this kind is welcomed as an experiment. We are really concerned with getting those whose duty it is to educate, to take over the job and do it. We would like to get textbook writers to take over this "Freedom of Choice" idea, for instance. We don't conceive that it is General Mills' purpose to be responsible for the education of youngsters. We want to help them, to be sure, but it's the work of the textbook publishers to furnish the materials that are used in the schools. We are trying, not to get out from under on this experimental work, but to show conclusively to those whose job it is to do it, that there is something here that needs to be and can be done. In that campaign we do use publicity, and a number of magazines, including *Management* and *Printers' Ink*, have carried articles describing the program.

We have another item in the offing now. It has an educational philosophy behind it that I think will interest you. All the material up to this point has been of the subject-matter type.

Modern education today is not going in that direction, however. Educators are trying to get away from the idea that education is merely a matter of filling up a youngster's mind.

They believe young people should think in terms of solving the problems in their everyday lives. These are presented to them in such a way that they can work them out individually and in groups. Then as they grow to maturity in a democratic society like ours, they will work effectively in solving larger problems.

To approach this particular idea in our experimental program we are coming up with a new unit in the fall which goes into the question of attitudinal development. Remember, we are concerned only with elementary school children in our experiment. We want to help these youngsters form the opinions and ideas that may stay with them all their lives.

Children Have Problems, Too

The teachers' guidebook manuscript which will accompany this material poses seven problems common to youngsters and adults alike. Probably some of you have them yourselves.

A—One is getting something you want, but can't presently afford. Do I hear any ayes on that?

B—Improving of performance of a group of which you are a member. I dare say some of you have thought of that.

C—Solving problems that are difficult, very difficult.

D—Assuming responsibility for your own conduct.

E—Winning out in a competitive situation.

F—Evaluating the problems of individual adjustment that changes and progress bring.

G—Meeting and overcoming discouragement, illness and other hardships.

We are presenting these problems in story-book form. In the first one—wanting something you can't presently afford—we have the situation of a youngster who wants a bicycle. He will probably be pictured as having some kind of work that will earn something for him but not enough for a bicycle. We will give him brothers and sisters, because most boys have brothers and sisters today—the schools are full and overflowing. We will describe the family and economic situation of this boy as one which leaves him right in his dilemma. How is he going to get his bicycle?

Our hope is that students will sit down and analyze that type of problem and will come up with certain answers. We are not going to let them come up with just any old answer. We hope that with aid from the teachers, they will be made to see the best and most logical solution. Without forcing children to come to any set conclusions, we are trying to make them see that some ways of getting things they want may be better than others.

We will ask them to think about the problem this way. First, try to eliminate some of your supposed wants and concentrate on others. What do we mean by that? Well, it may be

that the youngster who wants a bike really has other wants that are more pressing. He should assign priorities to them.

In every case we are pointing to economic adjustments, and one way to adjust to the problem of wanting something you can't afford is to figure out some way that you don't want it. Secondly, if that won't solve the problem (and we know that it won't for most of them), we suggest going after the thing we want ourselves, without depending on others (dad or the government). There are certain traits these youngsters can begin to develop at the fourth, fifth and sixth grade level that will make them want to be the kind of people you and I think Americans are.

In our program we are trying to develop the quality of aspiring to the right thing, the qualities of being self-reliant, industrious, resourceful, cooperative and other-minded. We also stress perseverance, courage, efficiency and thrift. Along with each of the child problems, of which I have given only one illustration, we will pose a comparable adult problem, because we want to carry this material into the family.

What You Can Do

You may wonder what all this has to do with Henry George. It's a far cry from the land question or *The Land Song*. But I strongly commend to you, on the basis of our experience at General Mills, that you consider going into the public schools and doing a job with them. We have evidence enough to show that the results are rewarding. You can start in your own local town on a small scale. Schools are everywhere. You have to go with the idea that you aren't going to sell them a bill of goods, however. I must caution you against that. My experience with Georgists is that many are over-zealous. We are just so eager that we want to talk overtime. You can't go into the public schools with that attitude, but you *can* go with the idea "here is something that has moved me. Here is something that motivates me to come to you and say won't you look at it. Together maybe we can help our youngsters live a fuller and better life than we are enjoying ourselves."

I wonder, as I see here a host of people, each with his own ideas as to how this job should be done, if the answer isn't this: Let's make the best of whatever talent, ideas, connections and contacts we have. Let's let the other fellow do his job the same way. Let's all work hard. Isn't that really the only way that Henry George's or any other philosophy is going to become reality in this world?

Congress has the Constitutional power and authority under the taxing power, to inaugurate a tax statute which would hold the state to the present state taxing machinery. States could levy an annual rate on site value which would publicly collect all of the rent without infringing any right perfected by the Constitution. I believe we have the tool at hand but we have not understood it or demanded its use by government. I know of no other way to collect payment of rent from those unwilling to pay it voluntarily.

—J. RUPERT MASON.