

## REPORT OF A FAILURE

We have failed to secure from the North Carolina Legislature a material increase in State Aid for Public Libraries. The fund was increased from \$100,000.00 to \$125,000.00 annually. If the fund is allocated on the same basis as it was for the past biennium, the amount available to each county will be increased from \$900.00 to \$1,125.00 annually. This increase of \$225.00 will certainly not make possible the realization of a minimum standard of public library service in North Carolina. A few Legislators can be singled out for the vision they exhibited in working hard and long for increasing the State Aid. We salute these Gentlemen for their untiring efforts. But they failed because we, as librarians, as library boards, and friends of libraries had not sold the importance of public libraries to the Legislators both before and after the election.

Too many Legislators were without positive conviction that public libraries have an important place in democratic society and the State's welfare. During the Session, public libraries were pictured as a light, recreational agenda to the educational facilities of the State. Some Legislators consider libraries as institutions filled with trash unfit to read. Another large group, which did not actively oppose an improvement of public library facilities in North Carolina, lacked the vision to support actively the library program. Their passivity amounted to a support of the opposition.

The Advisory Budget Commission which met in the Fall before the Session of the Legislature had not recommended an increase for State Aid when they made their recommendations to the Legislature. This was the beginning of our failure. If this small group of Legislators on the Advisory Budget Commission had been assailed by a general public demand for more funds to assist libraries, it is certain that they would have recommended additional funds for State Aid.

The Library Commission renewed its request for increasing State Aid from \$100,000 to \$211,098 annually before the Joint Appropriations Committee of the Legislature. Although strong supporters were present on this Committee, it soon became

evident that a material increase in State Aid had little chance against the opposition, and the passive group. Amidst oratory "glorifying" libraries into nothingness, the Library Commission's request was amended to \$125,000 which was later successfully increased to \$150,000 by a very narrow vote. When a Sub-Committee was appointed to put the Appropriations Bill into final shape, this small group reduced the State Aid to \$125,000, which recommendation to the Joint Committee was sustained by a narrow vote. State Aid had either lost a few friends on the Joint Committee, or they were not present to vote. Again, the failure was caused by an insufficient number of Legislators faced with demands from their home districts to support actively the increase in State Aid for Public Libraries.

The enactment of the Appropriations Bill which came during the final hurried sessions before adjournment, resulted in few changes in the appropriations recommended by the Joint Committee.

Contrasted with the lack of success in library legislation, the schools and the agriculture group accomplished their aims in securing enactment of practically every point outlined in their programs. Their lobbies in Raleigh were powerful. They had thousands of friends on the home front to besiege the Legislators with the demands of the school and agricultural groups. In fact, most Legislators were committed to the support of school and agricultural programs before they were elected.

Dollar for dollar expended, we know that public libraries provide educational facilities equal to schools, and reach a larger group. Public libraries provide educational opportunities to adults as well as to children at a time when adult educational development must proceed at a rapid pace. Words of the wise of all ages confirm the importance of books and libraries. If we are to be realistic, we must recognize that people in North Carolina do not actively support this view. In some instances where people have not had access to libraries, they cannot be expected to recognize the importance and value of public libraries in the democratic way of life. In other instances, libraries have failed to demonstrate their potential effectiveness as an educational agency in the

community. Perhaps we have given our opponents evidence for their belief that public libraries are merely a recreational and unnecessary agenda to the educational life of the community.

Specifically our failure can be broken down into the following:

1. Librarians and library boards have not been actually active in seeking the support of the Legislators, and in many cases they have failed to operate their libraries as a "people's university."

Libraries have failed also to develop an organization which can be compared to the Parent-Teachers Association. It is evident that the Parent-Teachers Association was a powerful influence in the successful enactment of legislation for the improvement of the public schools of North Carolina during the 1943 Session of the Legislature.

2. The members of the Library Commission Board were not forceful in the support of their Secretary and Director of the Commission in presenting to the Advisory Budget Commission and the Legislature requests for increasing State Aid for Public Libraries. They also failed to assist in the organization of a powerful lobby to support the request of the Library Commission. Leadership was their responsibility, but the burden was carried by their Director, who as a State employee, was not in a position to lobby effectively.

3. The North Carolina Library Association failed to organize an effective legislative program to support the request of the Library Commission. The writer, as President of the North Carolina Library Association, accepts responsibility for this conspicuous failure. I was present in Raleigh on only two occasions during the Session of the Legislature, when apparently I should have resided in Raleigh during most of the Session. Printed propaganda materials were not prepared by the Association to define the needs for additional State Aid funds. A contrast is obvious when we compare the work of the Classroom Teachers Association and the North Carolina Library Association with the Legislature. The Library Association should have organized a continuous flow of library board members and librarians to Raleigh during the session of the Legislature to lobby for enactment of library legislation. The Classroom Teachers Association

not only organized a constant flow of visitors, but also employed an expert lobbyist. The North Carolina Library Association should have carried out a similar program.

By recognizing the cause of our failure, we shall be able to prepare for a successful campaign in 1945. The Editors of North Carolina Libraries will welcome contributions outlining other points which may have contributed to the failure of our legislative program.

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