Louisianians Support Their Schools

The Public Affairs Research Council issued a report Tuesday on the teacher pay situation, and the report is as objective as it is comprehensive. Most of the data it contains have been covered in a series of Town Talk editorials on the subject.

One significant exception is a section devoted by PAR on the support which Louisiana gives to public education. Some observations that are pertinent to any in-depth approach to the problem of higher salaries for teachers:

Louisiana provides more revenue for public schools in comparison to total personal income than do most other states. For several years Louisiana has consistently ranked among the top states in National Education Assn. comparisons of total public school revenues as percentages of total personal income.

In 1962-63, the latest year for which rankings have been published, Louisiana ranked third in the nation in this measure of school support. Public school revenues that year amounted to 5.4 percent of total personal income in the state as compared with the national average of 4.3 percent.

Further, Louisiana spends more per pupil for public school operations than do many states which have higher per capita incomes. Louisiana ranked 32nd in the nation in expenditures per pupil in 1963-64 while ranking 46th in per capita income. Louisiana's expenditure of $399 per pupil for school operations amounted to 87.7 percent of the U.S. average.

Support of public education, therefore, is clearly not lacking in this state. One of the major problems appears to be that a low priority is given to teachers' salaries when, as PAR puts it, "decisions are made as to how the school dollar will be spent."

In 1963-64 only 52.7 percent of the school dollar went for salaries for classroom teachers in Louisiana. Only five states (California, Minnesota, New York, Pennsylvania and Utah) spent a smaller proportion of their public school funds for teachers' salaries.

The foregoing facts add to the evidence that public support is not the culprit in the current dilemma over teachers' pay, and bolsters the argument that a "strike" or "boycott" by the teachers would actually be directed against a citizenry which has leaned over backward to support public education, instead of against the ostriches that have run the government and the education system in Louisiana over the past two decades.