

New England Teachers' Seminar on Watergate Ends

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SCARBOROUGH, Me., Oct. 28 — A teachers' conference here that began as a discussion of how to teach about Watergate ended as a lesson in activism yesterday with leaders from throughout New England calling for the impeachment of President Nixon.

Five of the six presidents of the region's state affiliates of the National Education Association, a 1.2-million-member organization representing most of the country's elementary and secondary school teachers, were among the 25 signers of a petition for impeachment. Catharine Barrett, who was the national president of the N.E.A. last year, was also a signer.

The document was intended as a device by which to begin mobilizing the entire membership of the once-conservative National Education Association behind impeachment.

"The question now is whether we are going to let the fruits of today's meeting fritter away," Mrs. Barrett said as the teacher leaders were weighing the advisability of backing impeachment. "Is time going to run out before the educators of this country speak on this important issue?"

The one-day conference, sponsored by the National Education Association and its local affiliates, brought together 135 New England teachers to discuss "The Educational Implications of Watergate."

Later Development

After most of the teachers had left for the long drive home, the conference leaders gathered late yesterday afternoon to talk about what they had learned and how to encourage similar meetings elsewhere in the country. Gradually their concern grew more profound, and soon a theoretical exercise became a basis for action.

Among those who signed the petition, which was hastily scrawled on a yellow legal pad, were Arthur S. Coley, president of the Connecticut Education Association; Joan E. Flanagan, president of the Massachusetts Teachers Association; Donald Murphy, president of the New Hampshire Education Association, and Charles Sanders, president of the Maine Teachers Association.

Teacher leaders from Vermont did not attend the conference. Those who signed the petition said they did so as individuals and not on behalf of their organizations, which

they say they will now try to get to follow suit.

The unlikely setting for what the teachers consider a historic event was a race track, Scarborough Downs.

In the spacious clubhouse of the race track, which has completed its season, the teachers found themselves discussing morality while surrounded by \$2 win, place and show windows.

"Maybe it would have been more appropriate to draft our petition on the back of the Racing Form" commented Mr. DiOrio of Rhode Island.

But there was on the whole little joking. The teachers met in various seminars devoted to such questions as how to combat the attitude that politics is a dirty business, can teachers afford to teach the truth about recent political history, and how to combat the idea that individuals are impotent to affect major issues.

The tone of the conference was set in an opening speech by Representative Margaret M. Heckler, Republican of Massachusetts, who said that "there has been an erosion of confidence spreading like a cancer through this country."

"It is terribly relevant for educators to face the questions of Watergate and to think about how to rekindle faith in our Government, in our coun-

try," Mrs. Heckler continued. "The sense of confidence can be engendered by the way you tell students what power to the people really means."

While Mrs. Heckler was critical of the Nixon Administration, she did not call for impeachment. But the next speaker, Mrs. Barrett, a former Syracuse, N. Y., teacher, did.

"How in the world can the Congress of the United States suffer this man's absolute obstruction of justice in forbidding anyone to investigate him?" Mrs. Barrett asked in connection with the President and his dismissal of Archibald Cox, the special Watergate prosecutor. "He should be impeached. Only in that way will the Senate be able to bring out all of the facts on the sorry, sordid affairs."

In the seminar sessions that followed, most of the teachers seemed to feel that Watergate could be utilized as an excellent teaching tool to help pupils learn about the functions and malfunctions of government.

"We are witnessing one of the best classroom lessons we have ever had," said Dr. John Marvin, the executive secretary of the Maine Teachers Association. "Yet security dictates that a lot of teachers will still teach Chapter 8."

Dr. Marvin's admonition against continuing to teach

from the textbook instead of from current events was apparently a reference to the plight of those teachers who are said to fear that they might be reprimanded by principals, superintendents and parents if they were to deal with Watergate.

Continually arising in the seminars was the idea that teachers must be assured of academic freedom to have freedom of expression in the classroom. It was felt that strong teachers' organizations, willing and able to stand behind individual teachers in times of adversity, were essential if such controversial topics as Watergate were discussed.

Of major concern to many of the teachers was the question of how much they should permit their own opinions of the Watergate events to come into the open in their teaching.

"Some of the kids in my fifth-grade class say that Pres-

in Call for Impeachment

ident Nixon is deceitful and they want to know what I think," said Joanne Cortellino, a young fifth-grade teacher in Amherst, N.Y. "How do I answer them without having the wrath of the community on my head?"

Jacqueline Johnson, a fifth-grade teacher in Sanford, Me., remarked that she thought forthrightness was the best policy.

"We were discussing impeachment recently in connec-

tion with Andrew Johnson," said Mrs. Johnson, "and then we related it to Mr. Nixon's situation. The children asked me, 'What do you think?' and I said that I was frightened when I thought about impeachment and its implications.

"Then they asked me, 'Did you vote for him?' and I said that I did because at the time I thought that he would be a good President, but that I wouldn't vote for him today. That was being honest. I'm still waiting for the repercussions."