

RICHGROVE PONDERES SCHOOL NEEDS

RICHGROVE, January 12 -- Over 300 townspeople packed a school board meeting here tonight to discuss the education of their children, only to watch the school board chairman, a grower named Nielson, adjourn the meeting after allowing only one person to speak. But the little town of Richgrove, California (population 886) is in the midst of a soul-searching crisis over its educational system, and before the dust settles, the little town may up-set a hundred years of traditional education and completely reshape the directions and goals of its school system.

The school board in Richgrove is composed of three Anglos, and one Filipino, the only Mexican-American, Mrs. Horminta Lara, having resigned during the crisis. Board members Neilson and Steve Pavich are both ranchers and Mrs. Melton is a clerk for a rancher. The Filipino, Mr. Fernandez, runs a grocery store, and rarely speaks at board meetings.

Not only are there no Chicanos on the school board, there are no Chicano teachers in the school. Richgrove's population is about 80 per cent Chicano and perhaps 12 per cent Filipino.

Parents of Richgrove held two special meetings in December to which school board members were invited, but only Mrs. Lara attended. Between 100 and 200 citizens attended the meetings, showing the level of concern. The parents brought out the fact that school board meetings were held entirely in English and in the past had frequently been scheduled at times and places where working people could not attend.

They criticized the school for its lack of special programs designed to meet the needs of Spanish-speaking children. And they zeroed in on what they felt were paranozing and racist attitudes by the school principal, Mr. Blansett, and the Anglo majority of the school board.

The immediate problem of concern was the school board's decision,

without consulting the parents or community, to fire a group of Vista-Teacher Corps college students, most of them Chicanos, who had been assigned to work and live in the community and eventually become "Teacher-trainees," assisting the class room teachers. The ten Teacher-Corps members are all students at the University of Southern California and attend classes, usually with other Tulare County Teacher Corps students in near-by Visalia. During the first year of the program the students are expected to "work" in the community, get to know the conditions, get to know the families, parents and children personally. During the second year they are expected to work in the class room. The program was presumably to aid the students in their education, and would also benefit the community.

The outpouring of support from the community (petitions signed by over 200 parents requesting that the school board retain the program)

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did not sway the board members or the Poverty Program bosses who direct the program. While their "crimes" were never brought out in the open, the Teacher Corps students were accused of publically wearing UFWOC buttons, attending union meetings, and discussing the union and La Causa with farm workers in Richgrove (most of whom are already union members). They were accused of putting out a newspaper which discusses educational problems of Chicanos and farm workers, problems of racism and discrimination in a dominant Anglo society. They are also accused of helping the group of poor Richgrove kids accused of setting fires, pointing out that the kids were innocent until proven guilty and needed legal and financial help. They were accused of being "controversial". In short, the Anglo majority on the Board saw them as a threat to the status quo.

The Corps' well-paid boss, Frank Alderete, attended one packed community meeting, saw the overwhelming community support for the Teacher Corps, and then refused to back up the Teacher Corps students in the face of the School Board's attacks. His superiors, Mrs. Pat Hefferman in Los Angeles and National Teacher Corps Director Dick Graham, and National Vista Director Jack Ramsey, all seem eager to scuttle the program and come up with a "new program" which will keep the Teacher Corps students from getting too involved in the Communities.

Alderete even sought to have two of the students suspended from USC because they became "too involved in the community." The Poverty Bosses are now moving to remove Teacher Corps students from Earlhart for basically the same reasons.

Parents in Richgrove are moving to register voters and may launch a recall election. Such action may



be too late to save the Teacher Corps, but it might well be the beginning of a new era in Richgrove schools.

EL MALCRIADO SAYS: As is so often the case, the Poverty Program officials have used the good intentions, energy, and skill of young people to create a "program." The program naturally involves highly paid administrative positions, but the people doing the work, the students, are paid next to nothing. If the program gives the first hint of upsetting or endangering the status quo, the Poverty Bosses pull back, abandon the students and the community. But hopefully this experience has taught the people of Richgrove a lesson, and made them

Our children are trapped by the education they are presently receiving. In these few pages we have tried to raise a few of the problems we face in providing a relevant education for our children. At present the Union simply cannot tackle this problem. But in the long run, in building a new society based on brotherhood and justice, this is where it all begins.

more aware of the importance of the type of education their children get. If so, Richgrove will never be the same again.

