

No Homework for Kids Is Goal of 'Mrs. PTA'

By VIRGINIA KACHAN

CHICAGO, May 22.—(INS)—If "Mrs. PTA" had her way, kids would have no homework and the right to vote would be extended to 18 year olds.

"Mrs. PTA" is Mrs. Newton P. Leonard, of Providence, R. I., the president of the National Congress of Parents and Teachers, which opens its fifty-ninth annual convention Monday in Chicago.

A former schoolteacher, this dynamic, gray haired woman has been doing PTA work most of her adult life and expects "never to stop." She has reared two daughters and is the proud grandmother of seven children, ranging in age from 2 to 12.

Now winding up a three year tenure as president of the organization, which has 9,409,282 men and women members in the United States and Hawaii, Mrs. Leonard said in an interview:

"Homework for children in the primary grades is a symptom of the serious shortage of adequate school facilities and teachers in our country.

"Ideally no child—unless he is a slow learner—should be given lessons to do at home until he reaches the secondary (high school) level."

Mrs. Leonard explained that teachers in the lower grades are forced to hand out after school assignments "because classes are overloaded, there is little time for individual attention, and they help keep pupils' progress up to par." She said:

"Many teachers even work double shifts to accommodate the vast increase in children who are in the beginners stage in learning."

To point up the problems arising from insufficient schools and teachers, Mrs. Leonard has chosen the theme of "better homes, better schools and better communities" for the congress' annual convention. She said:

"Parents need to realize that homework is a necessity these days and make things easier for their children.

"That doesn't mean doing the homework for them, but rather viewing it with a positive attitude. Parents should express interest in the assignment, and provide a special place for the child to do the work."

To give parents an idea of what is happening in today's schools and what they can do to help, the PTA is sponsoring "study" courses in child guidance and allied topics.

However, Mrs. Leonard emphasized that there will be "no real solution until there is a true recognition of school support not only by parents but by taxpayers at large." She said:

"People should evaluate better schools as an investment, rather than as an expense.

"A bigger tax bite for education has compensation in other ways. A better educated person is less likely to be out of a job, for one thing, and this will cut down relief rolls."

Turning to teenagers, Mrs. Leonard said she has found during frequent trips around the country that as a "group they are level headed, well behaved youngsters."

Mrs. Leonard said she has met "many 18 year olds who are more conscious of the issues in the community, Nation and the world than their parents." She asserted:

"These youths have grasped the responsibilities of citizenship so well by the time they leave high school that, if I had my way, the voting age would be lowered to the age of 18."

Mrs. Leonard took issue with what she called frequent reports that juvenile delinquency is on the increase. She said:

"I don't think it is spreading at all, but rather that people have become more aware of delinquency cases. Roughly I'd estimate that 95 per cent of our teens are well behaved."

The PTA leader reported that the organization's campaign against comic books has brought results and the problem is working itself out.

She pointed out that most publishers have signed a code, pledging to keep from printing sexy comic books. And then she added with a smile:

"Although much has been said about the bad influence of shoddy comic books on youngsters, we found that more adults read them than children."