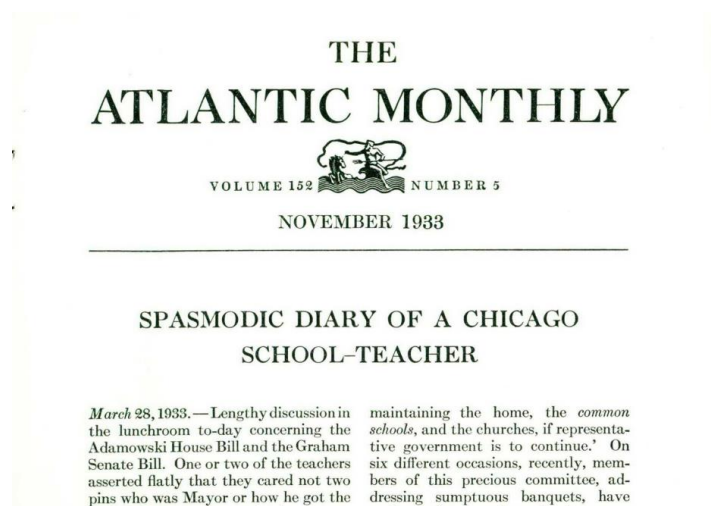
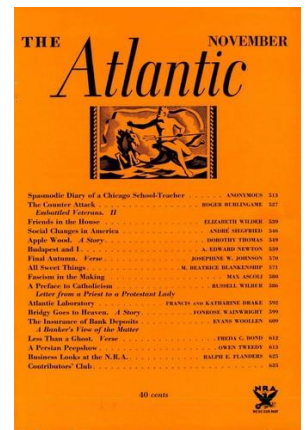


Spasmodic Diary of Chicago School-Teacher, 1933  
By: An anonymous Chicago public school teacher

This is an excerpt from the diary of an anonymous Chicago public school teacher, written during the depths of the Great Depression. The excerpt is from a longer portion of the teacher's diary published in the November 1933 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly* magazine.

*The Atlantic Monthly* was a widely read magazine that reached a national audience, featuring many articles on political and social topics like education, along with literature and poetry.



*April 5.*—It is the [Citizens'] Committee that is our enemy—made up of bank presidents, railroad presidents, packers, and directors generally of the wealth of the second city of the United States. There is no possible doubt of their intention; they are attempting to starve the teaching force into submission to their programme and to cripple the city's educational system. ...

*April 6.*—The strike grows. Communism has been charged, of course. ...

*April 9.*—More and more I feel myself being drawn to this more violent form of expression. Something in me cries out that it is bad enough to be poor, worried, and debt-ridden, but far worse to make a spectacle of myself. Nevertheless I am trampling down my pride, if that is what it is, and I too perhaps shall soon join the more radical elements of the teaching force in their demonstrations. With their nuisance technique they are getting results that I am beginning to realize could not otherwise have been achieved. At the least, they are calling attention to the deplorable situation in which we exist. Many of the teachers are actually facing starvation.

*April 10.*—[T]oday two thousand school-teachers stormed the City Hall and one of the banks. At the bank, guards were hastily stationed and the doors were closed. ... This city is perhaps legitimately two years behind in its taxes. ... [T]he lower and middle classes have been the good citizens in spite of the depression. It is the rich who cannot or will not pay. Appointing their Citizens' Committees, [page 518] they are

dictating educational retrenchment. The schools, they shout, must economize. The sympathetic press runs editorials about a ‘soak the rich’ campaign; yet we know that locally and nationally the poor man pays his taxes while the rich man hires lawyers to defend his plea that he cannot pay.

*April 14.*—...To-morrow I shall *parade*. I’ve come to it, at last. I loathe the idea, but the public must be awakened. I feel a little like Joan of Arc. ...

*April 15.*— ... At a conservative estimate, 20,000 teachers and students paraded, accompanied by high-school bands and flourishing many placards. Some of the signs were clever, some bitter, some only dull; but all of them [page 520] blamed the politicians and the bankers, and, of course, the Citizens’ Committee. ... It appalled me to find myself marching in a parade of protest, but I do think that only such methods will bring results. I’ve been converted. Once I didn’t believe it. But all other methods have failed. Perhaps the bankers and the Board will pay us to keep us off the streets.

*August 13.*— ... I feel pretty aged today. No fight left in me. Unless I can recover a little spirit I shall not be fit for another semester of school. The members of the Board appear to represent the thought of all ‘big business.’ The last fight is on. Elementary education for the masses is their objective—and nothing else. ...

*August 23.*— ... [I]n the afternoon [I went] to a meeting of the Board. ... The whole meeting, incongruously enough, was devoted to plans for obtaining a government loan for the building of more schools. All they want is \$14,000,000! No mention of the wrecking programme; and no discussion of the list of teachers and principals to be dismissed. The *raison d’être* of the School Board becomes increasingly obvious—it is the letting of fat contracts. They talked at length...of the plasterers and carpenters who would be benefitted by the building programme. ... No whisper of the gravy destined to drip into their own mouths when the huge contracts are placed. However, I am not discouraged. I still have faith in the gentleman at Washington. Some part of the loan may go through, but there will be a federal watchdog on the job to keep an eye on expenditures. The days of the grafting politician are numbered. The Board is protecting itself by uniformed policemen, fully armed, and by plain-clothes detectives—an incredible spectacle! The members are in no physical danger. It is their guilty consciences that frighten them.

*September 11.*— ... School opens in a week. I feel fairly fit, and I am ready. My finances are still appalling. ... I like to think, thousands of teachers are returning to their classes—prepared to serve, but also prepared to fight for a decent solution of the problems ahead. Heaven send us grace and courage to perform our tasks!

Text excerpted by Adam Mertz, History Department, University of Illinois at Chicago.

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