

Federal Aid: The Unmentioned Issue



BECAUSE during his campaign for the Presidency, Dwight D. Eisenhower spoke out against extension of Federal aid to education, many citizens concerned with the nation's schools charged, as soon as plans for the White House Conference were announced, that it was to serve as a "facade" to provide a good excuse for holding up action on the question. The issue of Federal aid to education is one which is closely related to the conference topics discussed on these pages and in particular to the problem of how we can finance our school systems and how we can meet our need for school buildings; for without talk about Federal aid many educators feel that any discussion of these problems at the White House Conference becomes almost academic.

Actually, the Eisenhower Administration has already somewhat shifted its position on the issue. Early this year the President submitted to Congress a program for Federal assistance for school construction—largely in the form of loans and grants to the states and local communities. Even this has not mollified the critics of the conference and the educational policies of his Administration. They consider the school construction program inadequate and point out that it was proposed only after a bipartisan move toward Federal aid had developed in Congress.

Basic to the argument over Federal aid is the Administration's contention that "most of our communities and states can build the schools they need from revenues raised locally and within the states in the manner selected by their citizens." Federal assistance, the Administration feels, should be limited to those cases where communities cannot afford to build needed new schools.

Those who challenge this position—and they are numerous among professional educators—hold that it is the reason for some of the shortcomings of the state conferences which are being held in preparation for the White House Conference itself. In his annual report to the National Education Association its executive secretary, William G. Carr, recently declared that "there has been no clear request to the states for their opinion on the Federal role in education. There can be no valid consideration of national policy by the state delegates at the White House unless the state conferences formulate their views on what the national policy should be."

The situation has also prompted the magazine *The Nation's Schools* to question editorially whether "some groups [are] fostering a conspiracy of silence to prevent free and open discussion of Federal aid to education." The magazine has added, "We're not asking that the conference either endorse or condemn any plan of Federal aid. We merely are insisting that all sides of the question be presented. . . . If the subject of Federal aid continues to be sidestepped or misrepresented at the state conferences we shall assume that there has been a conspiracy of silence and that the omission was definite and intentional. If the general program for the national conference does not include ample and honest presentation of this entire question, with documented facts and all points of view supplied to the discussion groups, it will then be evident that the conspiracy is 'aided and abetted' by national pressure groups." In support of this statement, a prominent educator has commented recently, "It [Fed-

eral aid] is the only question that is really important at this time."

Those who favor Federal aid for education have advanced several arguments for their side. Among these is the all-too-apparent fact that there is a great need for new school buildings (see pages 19 and 22), the fact that the traditional methods of financing school construction seem to be inadequate, and the fact that, so they believe, the provision of educational facilities is in part at least a Federal responsibility since the whole national welfare depends upon the education of its children. Opponents of Federal aid, however, argue that according to the U. S. Constitution it is the job of the state and local governments to provide for education, that there is not sufficient need for Federal aid even for school construction, and that our present system of taxation could be revised to provide necessary funds from state and local sources. In addition to these arguments the opponents of Federal aid also point out that Federal aid might mean undesirable Federal control of the country's educational facilities. (To this those who favor Federal aid reply that the principle of Federal appropriations for schools has long been firmly established without unhappy consequences.)

THE Eisenhower Administration's version of Federal aid was embodied in a thirty-nine-page Senate bill last spring (S. 968). It proposes that the Federal Government should aid school construction by buying up to \$750 million of local school bonds which are not salable elsewhere. It proposes to establish state school building agencies which would use a \$6 billion fund created through equal contributions by the states and the Federal Government in order to build schoolhouses and to rent them to local school districts. It also provides for \$200 million for Federal grants to states during a three-year period for the use of school districts unable to qualify for loans and it authorizes an appropriation of \$20 million to be paid to the state education agencies during the next five years for the promotion of school construction.

The advocates of Federal aid declare that such a bill if passed would provide little actual financial aid, but would result in high administrative costs, excessive red tape, and long delays at a time when immediate aid is necessary. The bill, they feel, might be useful as a long-range plan but it would do little or no good within the next two or three years. At the Senate committee hearings on this bill Dr. Carr told the committee that any Federal aid bill should provide direct grants to all states, that it should allocate funds on an objective formula, that it should provide for administration of the funds at the Federal level by the U. S. Office of Education and at the state level by the already-established state education agencies. In this way, said Dr. Carr, local and state control of education would be safeguarded.

As things have turned out the House Committee on Education and Labor has come up with a more generous and more acceptable bill than has the Senate, but Congress adjourned last month before the bill could be moved out of the House Rules Committee and acted on.

It is apparent, therefore, that the White House Conference on Education should include the issue of Federal aid to education among its discussion topics, if for no other reason than to end the suspicions which have arisen about its seeming omission.—LEONARD BUDER.

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Beyond the Classroom

A VAST vacuum exists today beyond the college classroom. Filling that vacuum is the Number One job of American education.

Consider some case histories. A lawyer we know is not yet forty but he has already won a wide reputation for his brilliant handling of complicated cases involving corporation law. Once outside the field of law, however, he is like a loosely sewn baseball that falls apart at the seams at the first real contact with a baseball bat. If you ask him about the 99 9/10 per cent of the world outside his own particular fraction you will probably draw a blank. If you ask him about the basic differences in philosophy and ideology between the totalitarian state and the democratic state you will get no further than the bald though not bold statement that one is very bad and the other is pretty good.

Or consider the case of another friend. He has spent almost ten years in college and university work in an attempt to obtain an education; but now he complains that his education has virtually been a total failure. He knows how uranium can be converted into plutonium, and he can calculate with a high degree of accuracy the amount of heat released by the atom at the split second of fission; but what bothers him now is that in a closely related and even more important field—the political and social and historic implications of atomic energy—he feels intellectually bankrupt. He has a strong sense of responsibility for the planet-shattering gadget he has helped to perfect; but he says he has little background or training to equip him to comment on the very problems the gadget has created.

Or consider the doctor who readily admits that the truly modern practitioner must treat the whole man, and who knows all about the critical relationship between body and mind. Yet his training—intensive training—actually serves to limit both his own horizons and his usefulness. He is a man with a stethoscope, a microscope, a cardiograph machine, an X-ray machine, a sedimentation tube, and a centrifuge. And there his education ends. He has spent so much time in mastering his profession that he has lost sight of the world of which medicine is only a part. He is not equipped to understand or deal with the relationship between society and his patient.

Judged by ordinary standards all these men have had the advantage of "higher education." And yet, whether in terms of the broader needs of their professions or their own comprehension of the community-at-large, they are under-educated, under-trained, under-privileged. They have yet to pass the literacy test of the twentieth century.

The conclusion is inescapable that it is no longer accurate—nor has it been for some time—to apply the term "higher education" to American colleges. What seemed adequate only a short time ago for the purposes of top-level education now fulfills an intermediate function at best. The definition of what constitutes a truly educated person has expanded so prodigiously within a single generation that the average college graduate of 1955 may be no better equipped than the average high-school or even elementary-school graduate at the turn of the century. This fast-widening

gap between formal education and the requirements of a world community is perhaps the main problem and challenge in education of our time.

E DUCATION fails unless the Three R's at one end of the school spectrum lead ultimately to the Four P's at the other—Preparation for Earning, Preparation for Living, Preparation for Understanding, Preparation for Participation in the problems involved in the making of a better world.

Adult education used to be synonymous with delayed formal education or naturalization courses or vocational training for grownups. But adult education today becomes just as important for college graduates and professional people as it is for the newcomer to the United States who is trying to learn the language. The language needed by the college graduate today is a complex one. First of all, he must keep himself up to date in his own field. (This becomes virtually a matter of the public safety in such fields as medicine, where basic changes in theory and practice have altered the main contours of the profession.) Secondly, he needs the kind of continuing education that will enable him to think and act intelligently in helping to keep up with the vast accretions of general knowledge. Finally, he needs to know how to look for and appraise information about the world of ideas and events. His country is going to have to make the biggest decisions in its history—both for the purpose of assuring its own survival and for helping to keep this planet in a single piece—and this may require some inspired prodding by the individual citizen.

Obviously, a back-to-school movement for the total adult population is neither likely nor possible. But a willingness to learn creates resources of its own. A book is still the finest portable university known to man. And, in a more collective sense, there is the rapidly growing prospect of a non-commercial national television network. No invention in the field of communications can come close to television in terms of its power or convenience. And almost no public issue before the American people today is more important than the question concerning the development of separate channels for educational purposes. Non-commercial educational TV network is now in its experimental stage. With public recognition and insistence it can become a living reality.

A vast adventure in education lies before the American people. The need is defined, the means are at hand, and the prospects are limitless. —N. C.