

# When a Community Votes "No"

*The Lakeland School District, a forty-square-mile consolidated district about fifty miles north of New York City, is typical of many contemporary, semi-suburban communities where the school population continues to grow faster than the schools can absorb it. In 1951 Lakeland had 875 pupils comfortably situated in three school buildings; today 5,664 pupils are squeezed into nine buildings, including a two-room "little red schoolhouse," like college boys in a telephone booth. When the children begin to outnumber the desks, more teachers, books, and buildings are needed, and bond issues are floated to finance the new facilities. Often the bond issue fails, or is approved belatedly. The following article examines in text and pictures why taxpayers vote "no," and what happens when they vote "yes" too late.*

By ELAINE ZIMBEL, a substitute teacher and mother of four who lives in Lakeland School District.

**I**N JUNE 1961, 1,400 voters of the Lakeland School District, New York, were asked to vote "yes" for the construction of a new elementary school that was to be used temporarily as a junior high school. Because this bond issue lost by more than 600 votes, the district was plunged in 1963-64 and 1964-65 into double and overlapping sessions. The junior high school, which was built in 1959, was already so overcrowded that as early as 1961-62, all seventh graders had to be bussed *en masse* to an elementary school in the easternmost part of the district. For those twelve-year-olds who lived in the western part this meant as much as two hours and forty minutes of traveling each day.

A year later, in June 1962, the voters were asked to vote on a package proposition which would have permitted the construction of a new high school, a four-room addition to an elementary school, and a bus garage. This also failed. But a few months later when the \$4,122,000 proposition was trimmed down to \$4,082,000 by eliminating the garage, and the high school and elementary school addition were presented as separate proposals rather than as a package, the issue was approved. Ironically, bids for the high school came in considerably higher than expected, and the voters had to go for another bond issue of over \$1,000,000 in order for the high school to have its auditorium and all of the classrooms originally planned for. At the same time, though, and included in that extra million, the fifteen-room addition to another elementary school, which is now nearing completion, was also approved. This month, because of these two buildings, double sessions will end—for a time.

But a recent study of the growth potential of the district by a team of edu-

cational consultants indicates that in eight years the total enrollment will be almost double what it is now, and to accommodate the 10,494 pupils that are expected to report in September 1972, four new schools and an addition to the new high school will be needed.

In order simply to provide the required space, the people of the district will go to the polls to vote on bond issues frequently during the next five years. Chances are that many will vote "no," just as they have in the past. Why they will do so and what the consequences will be are already on record.

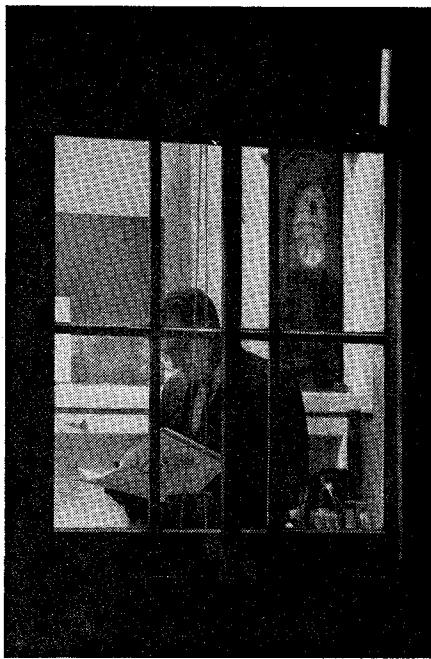
**W**HATEVER the hue and cry in any given bond fight, people who vote "no" do so for one reason—every bond issue means increased taxes. However, although it is most difficult to convince the nay-sayers of this, even if the bond issue is rejected their taxes will still go up. For the fact is that the cost of new buildings is only about 10 per cent of the cost of educating a child. Whether the 600 new pupils who swell the Lakeland enrollment annually are taught in new buildings, old buildings, or on the lawn of a public park, additional teachers must be hired to instruct them. Salaries comprise two-thirds of the district's budget, and the increased enrollment also demands more textbooks and higher transportation expenditures.

The question arises, are not these "normal" increases that the larger local tax roll resulting from new housing in the area automatically absorbs? The answer for Lakeland, and for many school districts throughout the country, is flatly "no." Here where the average homeowner pays about \$550 to \$600 per year in school taxes, it costs almost \$800 to educate each pupil. Clearly, if the new house on the corner registers three children in school, that house is a liability to the district. And here, approximately fifty miles from New York City, just as in other areas so situated near large urban and suburban centers, is

where the young families are settling. Property values are lower at this distance from the center while employment opportunities and transportation possibilities are not much different. So it is a fact that not only does the new house on the corner shelter three children, but the one next to it four, and the one up the street two, and the one on the next block five!

The Lakeland School District, along with its counterparts all over the United States, is perhaps in the most unenviable position. Because of its geographical situation, it must compete with more affluent school districts for quality teachers to provide quality education. Parents clamor for language labs and teaching aids and everything "they" get twenty miles away. Yet they protest, and accurately, that they cannot afford the constantly rising tax load. Older members of the community, whose children are through with their school days and whose prospects are limited or fixed on retirement incomes, in desperation complain that modern education is too full of extravagant frills. But, while it is true that Lakeland taxpayers have the third highest tax rate of the thirty-six school districts in Westchester County, a rate that is eight dollars higher than the average rate for the entire state, the Lakeland School District manages to provide a more than satisfactory level of education, competing with some of the best schools in the whole country, and yet maintains almost the lowest per pupil expenditure for any equivalent district in the state of New York.

Lakeland school administrators, who are faced with the problems of pressing school needs on the one hand and thoroughly pressed local taxpayers on the other, feel that financial aid must come from some other source—perhaps on the county level, perhaps from the federal government, which presently contributes a negligible \$4,000 to a \$5,000,000 budget, but most likely from the state. There seems little reason to expect that local taxpayers will be able financially to vote "yes" to new construction five or six times during the next six or seven years. Yet it is certain that if any of the bond issues to be presented within this period is rejected, even temporarily, the consequences will once again be double sessions in the Lakeland School District—half-day education—it costs thousands of dollars more to provide and offers thousands of pupils so much less.



Since schools are in session for longer hours, administrators find little time during the day for "think" projects. This scene shows a principal in his office at night—a familiar sight in the district.

Senior high students get home as late as 5:30 in the afternoon. In winter it is dark by then.



One in—one out. The seats never cool off, as the afternoon class of the second grade waits for the morning class to leave. Teachers and children must share desks, bulletin boards, storage space.



Offices are converted into classrooms, and administrators crowd into an old house rented nearby.

Teachers lunch in the basement storeroom.





# How Sinister Is the Education Establishment?

*In Britain, it is said, the Establishment rules. In Latin-America it is El Sistema ("the system"). In American public education, an interlocking directorate of educationists reputedly constitutes an in-group as powerful and as exclusionist as any, controlling legislatures, determining certification standards and above all maintaining the grip of "progressive" doctrines in the face of growing opposition both within and without the profession.*

*How real is this alleged educational Establishment? Who constitutes this power structure? How does it exercise its influence? What trends in its operations are discernible?*

*Since the existence of any informal power structure and the nature of its operations are largely a matter of opinion, there can be no authoritative answers. Perhaps the most useful assessment of the Establishment can be derived from the views of persons close to the scene, leaders in education and educational writers, critics, and editors. Two dozen key observers, some of them educationists, some not, were asked for comments on the nature of the nation's educational leadership. On the following pages the associate editor of the education journal "Phi Delta Kappan" reports their views and adds some perspective of his own.*

By DONALD W. ROBINSON

MUCH of the current interest in the Establishment stems from the extended attention given it by James Conant in his *Education of American Teachers*. In this book Conant asserts, "There is in every state capital a well-organized education lobby, usually centering on the teachers' association and the state department of education. To some extent the state education establishments share the beliefs of their national organizations, though when they translate these beliefs into state action highly significant differences—both in the ways of operating and the policies they adopt—emerge among them."

In general the twenty-four respondents concur with Conant that there is no one authority center, but a welter of them, sometimes acting in concert, sometimes in conflict and confusion. Harold Spears, San Francisco superintendent, says, "The national organizations give leadership in educational matters, but in no way do they act as an education Establishment in the sense of being looked up to as the Delphic oracle. American education seems to advance through local leadership, which seldom radiates beyond the state boundaries. However, if you do locate the power structure, please take me to my leader."

An outstanding principal adds, "The Establishment is pluralistic. The leaders see each other often—at conferences and meetings, on surveys and studies, on research projects and panels—but they travel in different orbits and their diverse views are apparent when aid for education is debated."

An education professor in Idaho spells

out the reasons why no group of educators in this country could wield the authority generally associated with the term *establishment*. "In addition to state control and the absence of a long-standing aristocratic tradition (as in England), there is genuine educational and philosophical pluralism in the U.S., and has been, as one of my students told me recently, 'from time immoral'."

EVEN the most untiring critics of educationism, the spokesmen for the Council for Basic Education, concede that some sort of in-group must exist. Former president James Koerner, says, "Whether or not one settles on the word *establishment* to characterize the apparatus by which public education is controlled, it must be obvious that such an organized apparatus exists and must exist in some form if anarchy is to be avoided." Executive director Mortimer Smith agrees that "An establishment in education is inevitable and necessary and there is nothing intrinsically 'bad' about its existence." These critics are far from happy, however, about the performance of the current establishment, as we shall see.

When Illinois biologist Harry Fuller and his historian colleague Arthur Bestor lashed out at the educators' lobby a dozen years ago, they excoriated the hellish "interlocking directorate" as a fiendish and immoral plot to thwart the public will and strangle all dissent. Today soberer critics recognize the necessity for a power structure and offer more temperate dissent to some of the entrenched education patterns.

If the twenty-four respondents agree that some sort of establishment does and must exist, however, they are in total disagreement about who constitutes this

(or these) nebulous authority center(s). Asked what organization is top-dog, they named outfits as disparate as the Ford Foundation, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), and the Educational Testing Service, while a number said that the establishment is so diffuse that no top-dog exists.

Most frequently mentioned as top-dog was the 900,000-member National Education Association (which failed to reach its goal of "a million or more by '64"). This organizational behemoth with a 900-member staff, thirty-three departments and twenty-six commissions, and boasting sixty-four state and 8,079 local affiliated associations, was undoubtedly the inspiration for the term *interlocking directorate*. NEA is unquestionably a power, if only because of its numbers (nine times as many as its rival union organization, the AFT). Although NEA membership has shown a loss during five different years since World War I, the trend has been steadily upward—200,000 in 1940, 450,000 in 1950, over 700,000 in 1960. More than 11,000 schools have enrolled 100 per cent of their teachers as NEA members. Yet the danger of assuming consistent domination of school thinking by NEA is suggested by the wide variation in its membership strength in different parts of the country. This strength varies from a piddling 3 per cent in New York City and 8 per cent in Rhode Island to a crushing 95 per cent in Kansas and West Virginia and 94 per cent in Oregon.

While the national profile of the education Establishment is sometimes described as a "paper tiger," the state groups are generally treated with more seriousness, if not with more respect. Indicative, if not typical, is this vignette of a state phalanx submitted by an education professor at a state university:

"The gatekeeper for policy in our college of education the past ten years has been a Tennessee politician whose ruddy complexion results from exposure to the distilled elements and whose speech is a folksy ungrammatical, hill jargon which seems to promote his popularity. This gentleman is the chairman of school administration on our campus. He is on the board which picks county superintendents. Because he obtained a high salary for the big county superintendent, who became the highest paid public official in the state, he indirectly achieved pay increases for both the governor and the president of the university. He serves