

THE FIGHT AGAINST FEDERAL AID FOR SCHOOLS

WAR TO THE HILT has apparently been declared by Catholic societies on the Smith-Towner Federal education bill, which has been indorsed, we are told, by hundreds of Chambers of Commerce, Rotary Clubs, women's clubs, and other civic organizations. Protestant adherents of the bill see in it splendid possibilities for the improvement and extension of education, and believe, says *The Christian Century*, that it will "meet the immediate need for Americanization work which was so sadly revealed by the war and which will increase as the new tide of immigration rolls in." But the Catholics, in addition to their fear that the bill is "ultimately aimed at the parochial schools," believe that it is "a gross violation of State rights because it takes control of education away from the States," and that it purposes "to have all private and public education at the mercy of a Federal bureaucracy." The bill lapsed in the last Congress, but is to be revived in the Sixty-seventh. It provides for the establishment of a Department of Education with a Secretary who shall be a member of the President's cabinet and declares that it shall be the duty of the department to undertake investigations regarding illiteracy, education of immigrants, public-school education, especially rural education; physical education, preparation of teachers for the public schools, and such other matters as, in the judgment of the Secretary, may require attention and study. An annual appropriation of \$100,000,000 is provided for the five specific purposes: for the removal of illiteracy, \$7,500,000; for the Americanization of foreigners, \$7,500,000; for physical education, health, and sanitation, \$20,000,000; for training teachers, \$15,000,000; for the partial payment of teachers' salaries, the promotion of general education, especially rural education, and the equalization of educational opportunities, \$50,000,000. It is further provided that "all the educational facilities encouraged by the provisions of this Act and accepted by a State shall be organized, supervised, and administered exclusively by the legally constituted State and local educational authorities of said State."

There are some good features in this bill, *The New World* (Catholic) willingly admits, and "every American regards with a sense of shame the immense amount of illiteracy in a country so rich as ours." But, asks this paper, would the Smith-Towner Bill abolish the evils it is aimed against? The answer is that "the history of Federal subsidies is an outstanding disgrace in financial management," and we are told further that—

"A huge bureau created by Congress is more than likely to fall into the control of politicians more intent on their jobs than on educational standards. The Government does not attract the best minds, and a reign of low mediocrity would result. The monotony of an educational monopoly would certainly tend to kill off initiative, and the last state would be worse than the first. The Smith-Towner Bill will not pass. We are coming into an era of economy. Mounting debts will make the new Administration chary of adventures. As a Southern benefice, we suspect that a Republican Administration will not lie awake nights pondering the educational shortcomings of Dixie."

Arrayed with the Catholic press against the bill, representative bodies like the National Council of Catholic Men, the National Council of Catholic Women, and the Knights of Columbus are also sternly set against its provisions. In a letter to Catholic organizations the National Council of Catholic Men warns them that the Secretary of Education and his subordinates "will always have in view the possibility of using the educational system in furtherance of their own partizan interests."

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The public-school system will become a vast political machine." And this machine, it is charged, "will give a Federal Administration the opportunity of creating an educational autocracy—really endangering the liberty of thought and information, which is a basic right of the people." Speaking for the organization of which he is the head, James A. Flaherty is quoted in the *Boston Pilot* (Catholic) as saying of the bill:

"The Knights of Columbus oppose it not so much on religious as on patriotic grounds. It is the entering wedge of Socialism in our Federal Government; it is ultimately the assertion that the State has rights prior to the parent over the child.

"The Knights of Columbus defeated the proposal in Michigan to abolish parochial schools. The Smith-Towner Bill is also ultimately aimed at the parochial schools. If these schools were abolished it would cost the people of the various States something approaching a billion dollars in taxes to provide the quality of education for the quantity of pupils that these schools contribute every year to the national welfare. Joining with the protests of other denominations and organizations, the Knights of Columbus denounce the Smith-Towner Bill as an attempt to erect a permanent tyranny over the minds of our children."

Turning now to the other side, *The Christian Science Monitor* sees the Catholic opposition as a natural effort to protect their own schools. "There is not much doubt about the reasons underlying this opposition," it observes. "They are essentially the same that are raised, here and there, wherever there is a movement or a policy calling for increasing expenditures of public moneys for public education, wholly outside of Roman Catholic control." What the Smith-Towner Bill actually proposes to do, it is argued, "is to encourage education in and by the States, without taking charge of it or controlling it." And—

"In proportion as Roman Catholic sentiment favors education in its parochial schools, it tends to object to a continuing or increasing support of the public schools. It occasionally urges the appropriation of public moneys for the support of the parochial schools, on the specious argument that the parochial schools are an acceptable substitute for the public schools. Since the Smith-Towner Bill proposes to aid, with Federal money, only those educational activities that are properly to be classed as public, because carried on for the benefit of persons of all religious beliefs but with special favor for none, the bill would be of no benefit to the parochial schools. It would not help private schools of any kind. In fact, in so far as it should work an improvement in the public schools and the quality of education they afford, it would tend to stimulate a sharper competition than now obtains between the public schools and the parochial or other private schools."

More bitter comment, however, comes from other quarters. "It would be too bad if the interference of a bigoted priesthood would prevent the adoption of a bill which contains so many promising features," declares *The Reformed Church Messenger*, remarking that "the all too familiar protest against 'Federal autocracy' and the violation of 'home-rule principles' is, as usual, employed to hide the 'colored gentleman in the wood-pile.' This cry has always been sounded when an attempt has been made to secure uniform divorce laws, Federal oversight of moving pictures, or the abrogation of the more atrocious forms of child labor. It is the camouflage of vested interests and will not bear the light of day." Respecting the objection that the bill will result in Federal control of the schools, *The Lutheran* says that this danger is specifically guarded against in the terms of the bill itself. Furthermore, we are informed, the National Education Association, which is opposed to centralized control of the public schools, indorses this measure.

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Cabinet Post

Educators' eyes are turning toward Washington. There the new Congress will be asked among other things to consider the establishment of a Federal Department of Education, with a Secretary in the President's Cabinet.

Thomas Sterling, Senator from South Dakota, will introduce a bill similar to the Towner-Sterling Education Bill, which was not acted upon by the last Congress. Horace M. Towner, Iowa Representative who formerly collaborated with Senator Sterling, is not on hand for the battle, being at present Governor of Porto Rico (*TIME*, June 25). But the new measure has the support of many educational societies behind it, representing between two and three million members.

The Capital News Service, speaking for the Supreme Council of the Scottish Rite in the South, declared that the present Congress cannot afford to sidetrack the bill. "The pressure . . . is overwhelming. Every patriotic and almost every fraternal order is behind it. Churches indorse it. Teachers, schools and colleges, alumni associations and undergraduates are for it. Chambers of Commerce and civic organizations demand it. Parents want it. School organizations want it. Almost everyone who knows anything about it wants it. . . . The time has come when the United States should do as much for education as it does for wheat and corn and pigs and cattle!

"The country of tomorrow will be the land of the children of today. The citizens of tomorrow are the product of the schools of today. Can anything ever be more important to this nation than seeing to it, through Government help, that its schools are making the best possible citizens of its children?"

The chief fear of the educational forces now gathered at the Capital seems to be not so much that the bill will fail to gain attention as that it will be met by a proposal to combine the Department of Education with the Public Health Service. It is consid-

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ered that each Department will operate more efficiently if independent, and in particular that the energies of the Department of Education will be wasted if they have to be subordinated to the purposes of the Health Service.

President Coolidge's message to the new Congress (See NATIONAL AFFAIRS), contained an allusion to the proposed Department which is not altogether explicit as to the point just raised. It is interesting, however, as indicating how important the main issue has become, and it is specific enough in regard to the availability of Federal funds—funds being always the first and last question in education.

Said the President: "Having in mind that education is peculiarly a local problem and that it should always be pursued with the largest freedom of choice by students and parents, nevertheless the Federal Government might well give the benefit of its counsel and encouragement more freely in this direction. If anyone doubts the need of concerted action by the States of the Nation for this purpose, it is only nec-

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essary to consider the appalling figures of illiteracy, representing a condition which does not vary much in all parts of the Union. I do not favor the making of appropriations from the National Treasury to be expended directly on local education, but I do consider it a fundamental requirement of national activity which, accompanied by allied subjects of welfare, is worthy of a separate Department and a place in the Cabinet. The humanitarian side of government should not be repressed, but should be cultivated."

The words "humanitarian" and "welfare" may be disquieting to those who do not favor coöperation with the Health Service, but the President's willingness for a Department will encourage many who now watch the new Congress closely and anxiously.