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Parochial Issue Perils Increased Federal Appropriations For Educational Purposes

Should taxpayers be required to support parochial schools? Bigger question than that—is the First Amendment to the Bill of Rights, that "Congress shall make no laws respecting the establishment of religion," being threatened?

That question is being asked in Washington. It has arisen because of a confusion over last laws relating to education; because of a recent 5 to 4 decision of the Supreme Court in the *Everson* case upholding a New Jersey statute which permits school districts to use tax receipts for transportation of pupils to parochial schools. Now it is raised again, more emphatically, in pending bills for large-scale Federal aid to education.

The whole drive for larger Federal aid to education appears likely to be wrecked again, where it has been wrecked before, on the question of parochial schools. Now pending in Senate and House are major bills to raise teachers' salaries and help correct school conditions in poorer states. But these bills run head-on into the whole parochial school issue either in what they contain or what they leave out.

Here is the story in brief: The founding fathers determined that there should be free exercise of religion and wrote it into the Bill of Rights, but as a counterpart forbade Congress to pass any law respecting "an establishment of religion."

The church-school issue began to arise only after World War I and in confused and ambiguous form. Today 16 states permit use of public funds for transportation assistance to parochial schools; 12 require Bible

reading in schools; 10 allow public school pupils to be dismissed from class to receive religious instruction in school or otherwise.

Federal school lunch subsidies are given to public and parochial schools alike.

The Supreme Court decided that a religious sect could not be compelled to send its children to public schools. Some of the laws were favored by Protestants, some by Roman Catholics.

Then came the *Everson* decision of the high court, last October. By 5 to 4, the court held that New Jersey school districts could use public funds, collected from all the taxpayers, to pay for transportation of Roman Catholic parochial school students. Taxpayers could be forced to pay taxes to aid religious training which they did not support. Strong dissents were written by the minority, notable Associate Justices Wiley B. Rutledge and Hugo Black. But the provision is on the books.

With teachers' strikes emphasizing low pay, and illiteracy statistics disclosing the weakness of schools in poorer states, the public rarely has been more conscious of the need for reform. Three million adult Americans never attended any school; ten million adults are virtual illiterates; two million children (6 to 15) were not in any kind of school in 1940; in 1945 the American public spent three times as much for drink as for schools.

The poorer states spend a larger proportion of tax income for schools than the richer states, but cannot keep up. These statistics are on record.

Educational funds in poorer states are so low as to be hardly believable. New York spends \$4,100 a classroom unit; Mississippi, \$400. By their place of birth some Americans are doomed to a sort of second-class citizenship.

A big drive is under way both in Senate and House to boost Federal aid to schools, particularly in poorer states. Senator Taft, who is not regarded as a spendthrift, is backing one bill. Senator Aiken backs another. These two bills differ greatly in their proposed generosity; they differ even more profoundly in their handling of the crucial parochial school issue.

The Taft bill, like the McCowan bill in the House, seeks to raise the level of school expenditures to a minimum of \$40 a pupil a year, and to this end would grant to poorer states equalizing funds, the total starting at about \$150,000,000 a year and rising to about \$250,000,000.

Senator Taft is a convert to the idea that greater Federal aid to schools is urgent and that the nation faces "a very grave crisis in education." But Senator Taft would not give subsidies to parochial schools. Federal aid would be extended to "private" schools in a state only in proportion to what that state already gives to such schools. In southern states this is small indeed.

The Aiken bill would provide much larger Federal aid to state schools starting with some \$450,000,000 and ending with more than \$1,000,000,000 annually. Educationalists, who only sadly compare America's liquor bill with its school bill, feel that the money could be well spent. But many people deplore the fact that the Aiken bill by-passes the states on the parochial school issue. It would grant direct Federal subsidies in all states. Senator Aiken estimates the amount of such subsidies as \$60,000,000 annually.

A direct subsidy to parochial schools seems contrary to some of America's oldest and most cherished traditions to many observers. They note that efforts to expand Federal aid to state education have run on the same rock before.

Parochial schools are feeling rising living costs, and there is strong pressure on Congress to support the Aiken rather than the Taft bill.

Even with the new pressure for school aid, it is doubtful, however, whether the Aiken bill could pass Congress with its parochial school feature. In either case, the showdown is likely to be postponed till the next session.

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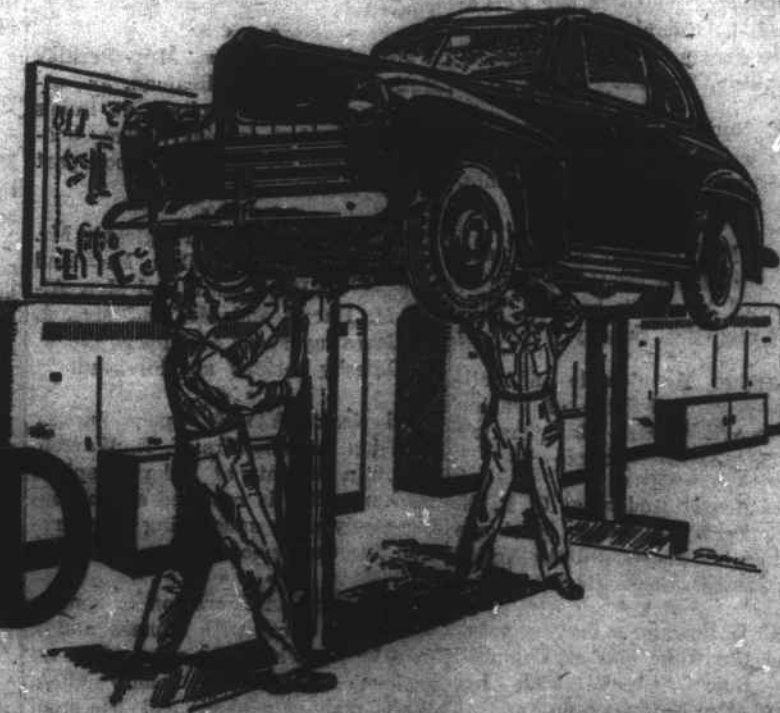
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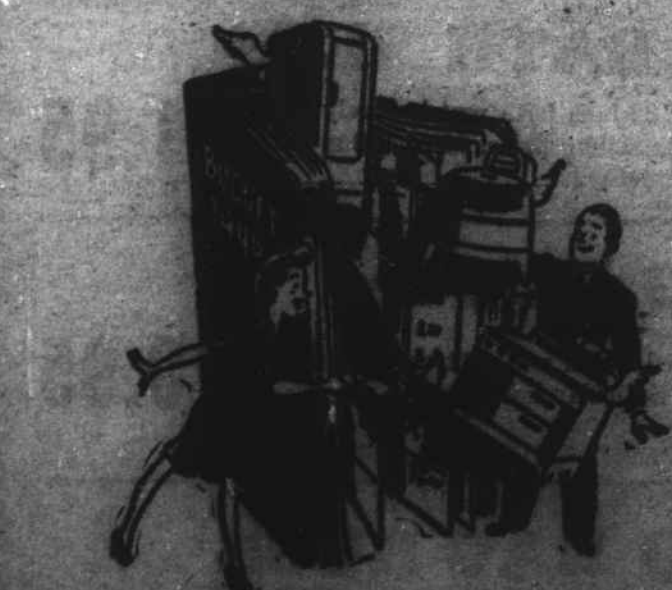
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