

Federal Aid (?) to Education

The various proposals for Federal aid to education have been mulled over by Congress, and a bill has been made law. This law calls for the expenditure of vast sums for student loans, scientific equipment, graduate fellowships, guidance, teacher training, language centers, etc. Proposals apparently not enacted into law were for student scholarships, text books, audio-visual aids, etc.

These proposals seem to attack only the peripheral aspects of the problem. There is no shortage of students around most universities; there are certainly a great many (though assuredly not enough) scholarship funds from private, corporate, and governmental sources; and any shortage of text books has escaped the eye of this observer. As for audio-visual aids, the mind boggles at a serious consideration of such devices when one remembers how these were used by the military in recent years: tape recorders, projectors, and neophytes do not combine to make a teacher.

These proposals attack the periphery at a cost of several hundred million dollars but totally avoid the central problem. The crux of the whole crisis in education at all levels is the shortage of teachers, and particularly the lack of good ones. The present proposals will be of very little assistance in this problem; indeed they probably will make it all the worse by further overloading the present teaching staffs. Yet there is something the government could do about this critical aspect of the problem—and at no expense to the taxpayers.

Probably the greatest single obstacle to securing enough good teachers is the financial one. On the average, teachers are underpaid, and as the cost of living soars into space, they are left farther and farther behind, or they abandon teaching. Inflation, "the cruelest tax," is particularly hard on teachers because the funds which support them are either private benefactions or state taxes. There is a severe limitation on both of these; neither can keep up with a persistent inflation. And the inflation is due largely to the unbalanced budgets of the same Federal Government which proposes to "aid" education.

The best "aid" to education would be for the government to live within its income and to cease and desist from those policies which harm the teachers. And the beauty of this logical course of action is that it would also help many millions of Americans.

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