

A Word With You

JUST as we start getting used to the idea of federal involvement in some phase of our life—like unemployment, retirement, housing—along comes a new involvement. Now it's federal aid to education.

The arguments are very persuasive. We are spending so many billions on armaments, it is said, can't we spare a few billions for the important job of educating our future leaders and workers? Look at Russia (the argument goes), they are actually ahead of us in training engineers and technicians. Can we afford to lag behind?

Education—private and public—has traditionally been a local affair in this country. Encroachment of the federal government in this domain may well be regarded with apprehension. It is vain to protest that all sorts of safeguards will be instituted to prevent federal control. With the best intentions in the world, the hand that holds the purse strings and the power must be placated.

And where is all the money to come from that the federal government will give for local schools? Out of the same pockets now paying taxes to school districts and states! What other source is there than the taxpayers in the 48 states?

Ah, but the local school districts and the states have done all they can and the school problem remains unsolved. This is perhaps the worst feature of the demand for federal aid. It smacks of a continual process of giving up more and more independence, of relying more and more on the One Big Central Government that is strong and can do anything and can take as much as it pleases to do what it wants. It smacks of a pain-

ful, little-by-little disintegration of individual effort and local responsibility.

As for that argument about Russia, take it away. Must we watch every move Russia makes and follow slavishly in her footsteps? Must we, too, have a regimented educational assembly-line in order to prove that freedom is better than communism? What if the engineer we educate doesn't want to make atom bombs, what are we to do with, or to, him? When we start evaluating everything we do in the light of what Russia is doing, it's time for an agonizing appraisal of freedom and anything else we're supposed to stand for.

Well, then, what about the impasse in the schools? Don't we want adequate facilities and good teachers for our children? Surely (they say), in the most prosperous era of the most prosperous country in the world we can tax ourselves a few more dollars for this essential job? Well, now! If all is prosperity, why, for the first time in our history can't we cope with the education of our children, but must run to Uncle Sam?

There's no escape from the economic problem. We are frantically surrounding ourselves with the trappings of prosperity—but when a problem is not basically solved but pushed down, it will simply push itself up elsewhere. At the present moment it is showing itself in the school problem.

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