

1966 Congress 'Most Significant' for Needy

(Religious News Service) The now-adjourned 89th Congress — whether or not the "greatest" as President Johnson has claimed — will be remembered as a period in legislative history when churchmen and church groups to a new high degree let their voices and concerns be heard in the law-making chambers.

Recognized as the most significant Congress from a social legislation standpoint since the days of the New Deal, virtually every major measure before the House and Senate drew action and reaction from churchmen. And though some bills strongly desired by religious interests fell short of passage — notably the 1966 Civil Rights legislation — on the whole church circles took satisfaction in the accomplishments of the Congress.

It was certain, too, that when the 90th Congress convenes in January, spokesmen for religious groups will again be deeply involved. This was apparent particularly on the civil rights front, even as the 1966 bill fell by the wayside.

In many areas, forces are being gathered for a new legislative assault on racial discrimination and injustice. Prominent in this battle is the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, which has some 20 re-

ligious organizations among 100 member-groups. The Conference worked vigorously behind the scenes in behalf of the 1966 bill and was prompt in suggesting that a special session of Congress be called to act on the rights measure, which was blocked in the regular session by a coalition of 42 Republicans and Southern Democrats.

Opposition to the "fair housing" provision in the rights bill was the main reason for its demise. Arguments over the provision, while strongly supported by several leading church groups, also brought to light a deep difference of opinion among religious constituencies. Though the special Congressional session was not called, there was little doubt that the debate on fair housing and other rights proposals will continue to evince religious concern in and out of Congress.

On the subject of housing, the legislative picture was not entirely black. A rent supplement measure to benefit low-income families came into being during the two-year Congress and all along the way had strong church support. The bill was passed in 1965, but at that time no funds were approved for its implementation; this session, \$22 million was appropriated for the 1967 fiscal year.

Among actions of the 89th Congress, its appropriations to the nation's educational system had virtually revolutionary implications for church-related schools.

Those church interests which do not have restrictions against using federal aid for their colleges will continue to benefit through record appropriations for higher education.

Congress added \$1.1 billion to an Administration request for funds for construction of facilities at graduate institutions, continued the National Defense Education Act which aids colleges and universities and added a privately employed loan program for students.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1964, which paved way for parochial schools to receive indirect federal assistance, was extended through 1968 and funds were increased for "impacted" areas. A total of \$6.2 billion was authorized for fiscal 1967 and 1968.

Debate over the education bills' provisions for aid to parochial schools will remain alive, however. It can be expected that moves such as one by Rep. John Buchanan (R-Ala.) to question the constitutionality of indirect federal aid to church schools, which failed, will be reviewed. A similar standing bill was passed in the Senate but has yet to be acted on in the House. It would provide judicial review of the constitutionality of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, certain sections of the anti-poverty legislation and a number of higher education bills passed in recent years.

Perhaps the most controversial of federal programs is the anti-poverty war. While widely endorsed for its aims, administration of the huge sums involved has prompted bitter argument, and churches are in the thick of it as they share significantly in administering local and regional programs.

A stormy debate developed in Congress, but the close of the session saw the anti-poverty appropriation boosted from last year's \$12 billion to \$16 billion.

Also, as Congress closed, the explosiveness of the program was illustrated in the public hassle between Sargent Shriver, Office of Economic Opportunity director, and supporters of the Civil Development Group of Mississippi (CDGM) which operated a broad Head Start project. Funds for the CDGM — which was started with support of the National Council of Churches' Delta Ministry — were cut off as the OEO charged fiscal irregularities and administrative mismanagement. Numerous churchmen charged, in turn, that Mr. Shriver had

yielded to political pressure from Southern Congressmen.

The OEO director remained firm, however, both in denying the "buckled under" to pressure and in pledging continuation of the Head Start project, but under other than CDGM overall control.

The far-ranging war on poverty elicited much support from churchmen on many fronts — in both cities and rural areas. Deeply involved in urban renewal, religious groups were among those applauding passage of the Demonstration Cities Act. The final action — \$1.3 billion for a two-year program to revive blighted neighborhoods — was only about half as much as the Administration requested, but still was seen as a large step forward.

On the rural scene, the first minimum wage legislation to include many farm laborers and migrant workers reflected long efforts on their behalf by church groups. Dramatized by workers' strikes and marches in both California and Texas, the legislation included a minimum \$1.00 per hour wage for agricultural workers, to be increased to \$1.30 by February 1969. These figures still were under the present \$1.40 per hour under the comprehensive minimum wage, which will increase to \$1.60 by February 1968. Also farm workers appeared still far from reaching another goal — official standing under the National Labor Relations Act.

On another labor matter which caused considerable concern — an effort to repeal the right-to-work laws of 19 states — the Senate talked a House-passed bill to repeal to death. The filibuster included considerable argument centering on whether the religious freedom of certain individuals would be violated if they were forced to join a union when their religion forbade it. Mormons, Seventh-day Adventists, Plymouth Brethren, Christian and Missionary Alliance and some other denominations have varying reasons for not condoning unionism.

Consideration and ultimate passage of a \$5 billion Food for Peace authorization, substantially backed by religious forces, produced for the first time a rather broad stipulation that the underdeveloped countries avail themselves of birth control information. It was provided, however, that countries do not have to adopt a specific program of birth control.

Among other 89th Congress measures of interest to churches was a bill which altered the Immigration Act to waive certain requirements for alien status. The action made it possible for some 150,000 Cuban refugees — many of them recipients of religious sponsored aid programs — to gain alien status, which carries many benefits. Earlier, it was necessary for them to leave the country and re-enter to apply for this status, a hardship for those who fled from Cuba.

Church groups — particularly Catholic and Methodist — were in support of the "Poinap Bill," which provides safeguards against the stealing of pets and mistreatment of animals held for medical research.

In the immediate wake of the M. Dirksen (R. Ill.), who led the last unsuccessful battle in behalf of a constitutional amendment permitting voluntary prayer in public classrooms, was seen as the likely spokesman again.

At the same time, he could be assured of firm opposition from numerous religious groups and leaders who in the past have upheld the Supreme Court edict against devotional classroom acts.

With the new Congress, it could be expected also that the proponents of prayer in public schools again would put pressure on Congress Sen. Everett

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'Good Thief' Mass at Prison

St. Cloud, Minn. — (RNS) — Coadjutor Bishop George Speltz of St. Cloud, Minn., celebrates Mass for inmates at the State Reformatory to mark the observance of "Good Thief Sunday" (Oct. 9). The observance honored St. Dismas, known as the "good thief" who was crucified with Christ. More than 120 inmates attended the Mass, which had a choir of 18 prisoners. The "Mass of the Good Thief" also was said in 400 U.S. correctional institutions on the same day.

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And certainly in the ecumenical spirit, this is the time not only to preach but to carry out in practice that "holiness and wholesome thought" of prayer for the dead — all the dead, not only those near and dear to us, the ones whose name we list in the little envelopes at church, but the souls in purgatory.

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Praying for the dead can be taught in schools, and it is, but it does seem to be an inherent part of Catholic home training, an area where Catholic parents can excel. They teach not only by what they say to their children but by the way they live.

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Willis Nutting in "Schools and the Means of Education," (Fides) points out this difference: "There is one thing a professional teacher can do so much better than a parent that the parent had better not even try it. The professional teacher can keep a roomful of 50 restless young ones in some semblance of order for several hours. She (or he) can also arrange it so that each of these is able to learn something even though no two of them have the same capacity. The parent can't do that, but the beautiful thing is that he doesn't have to. The lack of this educational technique need not hinder him at all. He is not teaching a child — his child."

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Clergy Said Dragging Feet On Race Issue

A prominent Roman Catholic layman strongly criticized his Church today for dragging its feet on the issue of racial justice.

In a signed article appearing in the current issue of Look Magazine, John A. McDermott, executive director of the Catholic Interracial Council of Chicago, charged that "racism has spread like an infection throughout the Catholic Church."

When it comes to race, he said, the Catholic Church on the human level "is more white than it is Christian."

In his strongly worded article, McDermott said "the truth Church leaders must face is that racism is a pernicious evil that requires strong, not soft action."

"Some pastors fail to act because they are afraid or baffled about what to do. They can be helped by their bishop. But there are some pastors who, it must be said, are simply bigots."

N.Y. Lawyers Hear Rector
New York — (RNS) — The traditional "Red Mass" was offered for the 38th year in New York in St. Patrick's Cathedral.

The New York Guild of Catholic Lawyers has sponsored the Mass every year since 1928 when it introduced the tradition to the United States. First celebration of the "Red Mass" took place at St. Andrew's church in Foley Square. Since then, similar large have been formed and the Mass is offered annually in most large dioceses in the U.S.

With Francis Cardinal Spellman presiding, the Mass was celebrated by Auxiliary Bishop George H. Gullfoyle.

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