

Presidential Unit Urges Nonpublic School Aid

Washington, D.C. —(RNS)— The President's Commission on School Finance warned that the system of public schools "which has served our people so long and so well is, today, in serious trouble, and if we fail to recognize it, our country's chance to survive will all but disappear."

At the same time, the commission urged aid to church-related schools.

To improve the quality of education in public schools, the commission recommended that states bear the primary burden of funding the public schools to close the gap between sums paid per pupil by rich and poor districts.

Despite court restrictions on direct aid to non-public schools, government agencies were urged to "promptly and seriously consider such forms of public assistance to private schools as tax credits, tuition reimbursements, scholarship assistance and "equitable sharing in any new federally supported assistance programs."

While the commission's recommendations deal specifically only with the quality of education in the nation's public schools, the 147-page report said:

"We find that the most serious problems exist among those schools sponsored by Roman Catholic institutions." Commission Chairman Neil H. McElroy told newsmen that "the position of the commission is that we should continue to try to find ways in which financial assistance could be made available to non-public schools."

"I myself have not found one which is both feasible and judicially acceptable," he said.

Under the proposed commission plan, the federal government would offer the states between \$4.6 billion and \$7.8 billion over the next five years as an incentive for assuming the financing now being carried out by 17,500 local school districts.



St. Patrick's Day Medal

This is the first annual St. Patrick's Day Medal, designed by Irish sculptress Gabriel Hayes O'Riordan and struck by the Franklin Mint in Philadelphia. The first commemorative medal ever made entirely of pure Irish silver, it will be mailed on March 17, 1972 — St. Patrick's Day — from Wicklow (Cill Mhantain), where St. Patrick landed on Irish soil in 432 A.D., an event the medal commemorates. (RNS)

Census Study

Catholic School Enrollment Down 25 P.C. in Five Years

Washington, D.C. (RNS) Roman Catholic elementary and secondary schools underwent a 25 per cent loss of students in

the last five years, according to a Census Bureau study released here.

The sharp drop, confirmed by

officials of the National Catholic Educational Association, was attributed to rising costs, the loss of teaching nuns and other religious and changes in the attitudes of Catholic parents since Vatican II.

There was a corresponding 6 per cent increase in public school enrollment.

About 5.4 million children — nearly 10 per cent of the country's school population—attend private schools, the study noted.

At the present time, less than half of the nation's Catholic children attend parochial schools.

The move to the suburbs by a large proportion of Catholic parents was cited by NCEA officials as one of the major reasons for the decrease in Catholic school enrollment.

Dr. George Elford, research director for the National Catholic Educational Association, said this move, often accompanied by heavy financial burdens, makes the cost of a Catholic education extremely difficult. He noted that a typical annual tuition for a Catholic elementary school is \$300 and much more for a high school.

In addition, lay teachers now predominate in most Catholic schools. Their demands for salary parity with public school teachers are increasing and increasing and the gap is slowly closing.

"Their explanation that abortion wasn't on the agenda cuts no ice", said Golden. "The question is why wasn't it on the agenda."

"Last year the committee conducted three hearings on abortion. One of their recommendations is still in committee. Why no hearings this year?"

The reason given is that there is no need for these hearings since any bills before the Health Committee were considered elsewhere and didn't concern abortion.

"That's interesting", Golden said, "Do you know how many hundreds of bills there are before the Health Committee now. Why, there is even a bill concerning abortion in the Health Committee with Sen. Lombardi's name on it as introducer." It's number S 7349.

"There are significant and statewide groups of people who wish to bring the abortion issue to the legislature and appear at hearings. Why will the health committees not hear them this year?"

Health Hearings Cancelled, 'Abortion Coverup' Charged

Albany — Surprise and concern were expressed here this week at the announcement from Sen. T. Lombardi and Assemblyman Ginsberg that their Joint Health Committee hearings had been canceled.

"This is another example of the sweep-it-under-the-rug attitude the legislature is taking on abortion this year", charged Ed Golden, State Right to Life chairman.

Originally scheduled for March 8 in Albany, the hearings had been the focal point for numerous pro-life groups around the state to bring the abortion issue out of the legislative closet.

They had been requesting time to address the committee on the abortion issue "which is certainly a significant issue before the legislature", Golden said.

The cancellation has stirred the ire of the pro-life groups who believe the hearings had become such a potential hot spot that they were canceled because of the "conspiracy of silence" on abortion apparent this year on the hill.



Denies Kidnap Plot

Sister Elizabeth McAlister (right), one of the defendants in the Harrisburg 7 conspiracy trial, denies that there was a plot to kidnap Presidential adviser Henry Kissinger. Anne Berrigan, niece of Fathers Philip and Daniel Berrigan, joins Sister McAlister at a Cleveland press conference. During the trial, the government charged that in two letters exchanged between Father Philip Berrigan and Sister McAlister, the two discussed a plan to kidnap Kissinger. (RNS)

Birch Society Critical Of Nixon Trip to China

Belmont, Mass. — The John Birch Society has voiced strong opposition to President Nixon's trip to Communist China.

The statement said, "We were appalled when we first learned of President Nixon's plan to visit Communist China. The John Birch Society feels that the United States Government should not fraternize with a criminal government that murdered between 34 million and 63 million Chinese citizens to consolidate its power. To treat these barbarians as a legitimate government, to have the President of the United States meet with them as equals, and to accept them as rulers of the Chinese people, is a betrayal of

all the United States represents."

It continued, "One of the scenes in the ballet, attended by the Nixons, depicted the Red army practicing marksmanship; and their target was a caricature of Gen. Chiang Kai. Shek. It is shocking and disgraceful that the President of the United States would attend and applaud this type of program. It is little wonder that the pro-Communist forces within the United Nations felt confident that the government of free China could be ousted and denigrated, while the Communists could be admitted and given prestige."

Mrs. Abernathy Assails 'Police State' in Ulster

New York — (RNS) — The Catholic-led civil rights movement in Northern Ireland has goals "strikingly similar" to the U.S. human rights efforts, Mrs. Juanita Abernathy, wife of the Rev. Ralph David Abernathy, said here on returning from Ireland.

Mrs. Abernathy led a four-member investigating team from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), which is headed by her husband, to troubled Ulster.

"When we left (the U.S.), we were already in sympathy with the basic goals of our host organization, the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association," Mrs. Abernathy said. "These goals, (are) strikingly similar to those of the human rights movement in our country, including the principle of one-man, one-vote; an end to discrimination in housing and employment; an end to gerrymandering of electoral districts, and establishment of a government in which all groups have a voice."

Mrs. Abernathy was accompanied by the Rev. Bernard S. Lee and Carl E. Farris, SCLC officials, and Mrs. Hosea Williams, wife of the national SCLC program director.

The group talked with people in the streets, workers, youths, Protestants, Catholics and British soldiers, according to Mrs. Abernathy. She said that sym-

pathy with the civil rights movement was "reinforced by what we saw and heard." Mrs. Abernathy stated:

"We learned how the Special Powers Act is used as a police state tactic to arrest without warrants and detain innocent people without a hearing and intern them indefinitely on trumped-up charges. We learned how the wives and children of those detained are subjected to continuous harassment in their private homes. . . We heard of the most savage and unspeakable tortures taking place in the jails. We saw how such policies as these, and the violence of British troops against the Irish people, have produced intense and explosive fury throughout Northern Ireland."

She charged that the governments of Ulster and of Britain have "used religion to separate the people for political, not religious reasons. The problems of the Irish people are not religious problems. They are political and economic; lack of representative government, extreme and widespread poverty, hunger, inadequate education, high unemployment and under-employment."

In Mrs. Abernathy's opinion, British troops should leave Northern Ireland, the requests of the Civil Rights Association should be granted, a representative and non-sectarian government formed and Ireland ultimately united.