

THE CONTINUING RESPONSIBILITY OF EDUCATORS

Francis Keppel

As I understand it I am here to substitute for Mr. James A. Kelly, who is ill. Those of you who will look at the back of the program will discover that Mr. Kelly works for the Ford Foundation. I made some inquiry into what is really wrong with the poor fellow, and the truth is he has lost his voice from saying "no." Now following that line of reasoning I wonder whether Mr. Kelly might not have made some of the following negative statements as the result of this conference. Since they are so well trained down there to say "no," I shall presume he thinks in those terms.

First, I got the impression from this conference that the courts may *not* be well qualified either to raise taxes or to prepare legislation. So that while we honor the courts, we should not depend on them for detailed answers to our educational problems. However, I must add a more personal comment that I do not know if Mr. Kelly would have made because he is younger than I am. As I look back over the last 20 or 25 years it never occurred to me to get the lawyers and the courts on our side in arguing a political case before legislators. It took a "Wise" man — who happens to be here behind me — to get us thinking in those terms. Frankly, I think I was a little slow, because the facts with regard to the willingness of the court to enter such areas became clear after 1954-55.

Second, I got a very clear impression at this conference that local government does *not* hesitate to argue for an increase in state taxes, and state government does not hesitate to argue for an increase in Federal taxes, but local government does not argue in favor of increasing its own taxes. Now is that sense of progression correct? I have lived or worked at all these levels, one way or another, and they are all going to be angry whatever we do.

Mr. Keppel, Chairman of the Board of the General Learning Corporation, was Dean of the Graduate School of Education, Harvard University, 1948-62, U.S. Commissioner of Education, 1962-66, and former Assistant Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare (for Education).

Third, Mr. Charles Benson made a point which he said surprised him a little when he got into New York (though I doubt it) — that full state funding will *not* fill the pail of the city at the start. And what he only implied, because he is an economist and not a political scientist, is that there are lots of votes in the cities.

Another "negative" which is really distressing for those who write the rhetoric before state legislatures and local bodies is that we can no longer honorably use the statement that educational productivity is directly related to class size. That is going to tone down the speeches for a long time — really a long time.

Next, local control of educational policies is not a myth, but Mr. Conant tells us it is a *must*, for management reasons and for sensible control of expenditures. I happen to agree with that entirely. However, we have surrounded the "myth," or rather the "must," with the concept of dollars or rather raising revenues, and said that if we *really* controlled the dollars, then we controlled the schools and then everything would be all right. The problem, of course, was that we really did not control the dollars. The myth was wrapped around raising the dollars when our attention and concern should have been devoted to the management of them, if I understand Mr. Conant's major point. And I think it is a major point to this conference. It worries me that many of us who have been working in the field of education for a good long time got caught up in that myth and did not realize this central point.

If you add all these negative statements together, I think one conclusion comes out fairly clearly from this conference. It looks to me as if educators had better not assume that actions of legislatures or courts are going to deal with the fundamental issue, which is the question of equity in the handling of children. The success of full state funding or any other scheme is going to depend on the extent to which the educators make it work. We have been remarkably lucky since 1945 in this country. We have had a system in which the middle class, in part because of their dissatisfaction with the quality of education provided their children, moved out of the cities. In one sense legislation encouraged this with laws in regard to housing, writing off interest payments on mortgages on the income tax, for example. Presumably, had we really wanted to stop the so-called "lighthouse" area system, we could have done it by tax laws making it much more difficult for individuals to move from cities to the suburbs and country. But the fact that we did not at least do this: the steam of discontent that was building up in many of our cities, and rural areas too, about the inadequacies of their schools, did not

blow up the kettle. People moved out. Apparently all this time we have had our "lighthouses" in the wrong places, however. We know now that the net result of that policy has been that we now have not steam but a boiling cauldron of discontent in the cities, but at least it took the heat off for the last 25 years — if I understand correctly what has been said around here.

Furthermore, we have had a quarter of a century in which, and I will put this in the snarliest way possible, we have in part been conducting a private school system under public auspices. Under this system the parents in a sense paid tuition by paying higher taxes on their houses. That is, in one sense you could say that the "lighthouse" schools were private school systems under public auspices. This is a very harsh and unpleasant thing to say, but it *is* one way of looking at what has actually gone on. And one need not apologize for it entirely.

Now if I understand what has been said by all the gentlemen before me, we cannot do that any more. Let us not debate whether we should have done it at all. We did it. Now the question is: do we have to run a real public school system with equality of support? And clearly the key issue is: can we as educators manage it so that the qualitative performance is comparable, slum to Newton? It would seem to me then that full state funding ultimately comes back to the educators. We cannot depend on the courts or the legislature to manage it. If we are really going to run what I have sardonically called a *real* public school system, rather than a system which is made up in part of private schools under public auspices, the qualitative control to assure reasonable equity of educational provisions will remain in the hands of the educators, not the courts and not the legislature. I see no way out of that. The ball then comes right back to us.