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Recommendations to Congress

Publication in this issue of the full report of the Association's recently held Parliament of Science will give readers a chance to judge for themselves what the Parliament accomplished. Press assessment has varied from reasonably enthusiastic praise to the strong criticism that while the Parliament discussed a number of important issues it usually did not carry the discussion to the point of making concrete recommendations about what should be done. Judgments about the holding of the meeting have been more uniform: most commentators have agreed that the effort itself was a good one and that the Association should be commended for bringing the thinking of scientists to bear on problems of science and public policy.

Such a meeting is one means through which scientists can express their judgment on matters of public policy, but it is not the only means. Individual judgments are also necessary, and individual judgments may be more specific in recommending action that the individual considers desirable.

There is now a quite specific opportunity to make known one's individual views on how the Federal Government can give the most help toward the improvement of education. Senate and House committees have held hearings on education bills and will soon report their recommendations—probably in the form of a new bill, or bills, embodying whatever the committees decide to retain of the original proposals. There is considerable uncertainty about how the various differences will be compromised, especially on one point. Last year and the year before, Congress defeated proposals that federal funds be used for the construction of new school buildings. This action was largely determined by the segregation issue; some members insisted that a segregation clause be included in the legislation; others refused to vote for the bill if a segregation clause was included; some saw a favorable vote on the segregation clause as a means of insuring ultimate defeat of the whole bill.

This year both of the major education bills [see *Science* 127, 389, 21 Feb. 1958)] emphasize improvement of the quality of education and say nothing about school construction. School construction proposals are still very much alive, however, and it is quite likely either that this feature will be included when the bills are reported out of committee or that amendments will be offered during debate. Either way, the segregation issue will rise again. The result will probably be defeat for school construction funds and quite possibly for the other proposals as well.

Supporters of the idea that federal funds can best be used to raise educational standards and to improve the quality of education are therefore faced with a problem of practical politics. Even though they may not oppose the use of federal funds for school construction per se, they have to decide whether to support or to oppose the addition of school construction proposals to the present bills. Support for the inclusion of money for school construction will probably not be strong enough to secure adoption of this legislation, and may indirectly help to defeat the other educational proposals. Opposition may appear to be a denial of one of education's real needs, but it may on the contrary actually increase the chances of getting the other proposals approved by Congress.

In the collective judgment of the Parliament of Science, efforts to improve the quality of teaching and education should take priority over the construction of more classrooms. The Parliament did not go beyond the statement of this principle, however, to indicate what actions should be taken in such a practical dilemma as the one that faces Congress. Scientists, together with faculty members in all fields and at all levels, have a major interest in how Congress resolves this problem. The members of Congress will be helped by knowing what individual scientists and educators recommend.—D.W.