

Science and the News

The School Bill: Notes on the Political Situation

The famous House Rules Committee became a bit more famous last week. In mid-June two of the three Catholics on the committee joined with the seven conservatives to form a 9 to 6 majority against considering the school bill. What they wanted was a companion bill containing a program of loans for parochial schools. The Education and Labor Committee dutifully produced an amended National Defense Education Act containing such a program. The Rules Committee then decided against sending either bill to the House floor for a vote. Mr. Delaney, of Brooklyn, having concluded that the loan program was "just a sop." Mr. O'Neil, of Massachusetts, returned to his normal position as a supporter of the Administration, but Delaney plus the seven conservatives made the vote against the education bills 8 to 7. It was a most peculiar situation. Mr. Delaney and Mr. O'Neil were widely and loudly denounced for holding the school bill up for ransom. The Administration was more mildly and less widely denounced for putting up the ransom. Then Mr. Delaney decided he did not care for the ransom after all, and that he would rather kill the baby.

All of this was curious, but its real effects have been exaggerated. The Rules Committee action was widely reported to have killed the school bill. The school bill may well be killed, but the reports last week that it was already dead were, at the least, premature.

Committee Action

The Rules Committee action, barring an unexpected turnabout by Delaney, means that the school bill cannot reach the floor of the House by the normal route of getting a resolution from the committee sending it to the floor for debate. On an issue on which the House is as closely divided as it is on this one,

this would normally foreclose any realistic possibility of the bill's reaching a vote. There are several methods of bypassing the Rules Committee, but all of them are awkward and easily frustrated unless there is a strong majority in the House in favor of the bill. There is no such ready-made majority for the school bill.

On the other side, there are two factors which could pull the bill through despite all obstacles. The Administration, knowing from the start that it faced an uphill battle on the school bill, had the foresight to tie together the intensely controversial new school-aid proposal with an entirely noncontroversial proposal for renewing an existing program of federal aid to what are called "impacted areas." The impacted areas are school districts where the amount of untaxable government property makes it difficult for the district to finance its schools. If a private company builds a factory in a town, the town levies property taxes on both the factory and the homes of the employees to pay for schools for the children of the employees. If the government establishes an army base in a town, the base cannot be taxed, and homes of the servicemen who live on the base cannot be taxed. This problem led to the impacted areas program, where the government gives grants of money to the school districts in lieu of the taxes they would have levied if the property were privately owned. The program is very widespread: three out of four members of Congress have impacted areas in their districts. On the average, each of these Congressional districts receives \$1 million a year in direct federal school grants. The program expired 30 June. It is an understatement to describe the pressure of the 319 Congressmen from such districts to see that the program is renewed as intense. As long as the supporters of the general school bill can succeed in keeping general aid to schools tied to the impacted areas pro-

gram, a bill containing both cannot be considered dead.

The impacted areas program therefore gives the school bill's managers a good deal of leverage. Under the right circumstances, it might be sufficient to get a general school aid bill through the reluctant House. Getting the right circumstances depends partly on questions of timing, partly on how fully the President is willing to commit himself to the fight. These two factors are related. Both point toward delaying a showdown on the school bill until the closing days of the Congressional session. Aside from the question of the President's role, the best time to bring about a showdown will be when the country is thinking about schools, which will be at the very end of the summer, or in September, when the school year is about to begin. Delaying the showdown will also make it easier for the President to play a major role in the controversy.

Next week the Senate will take up the major item on Kennedy's legislative program, the foreign aid authorization, and this issue will dominate the debates on Capitol Hill well into August. This is the one controversial issue where there not only is no Congressional resentment at the President's going to the people to pressure Congress into supporting him, but where Congress expects to be, indeed wants to be, publicly pressed by the President. Congress expects the President, acting as national leader, to tell the country why foreign aid is necessary and thus make it easier for individual Congressmen to vote for it. But this makes it awkward for the President to be simultaneously active on both foreign aid and the school bill. On one issue he must be wholly above domestic politics; on the other he cannot help being deeply immersed in it. Both cannot be done simultaneously with full effectiveness, and thus it will be difficult for the President to play a very active role on the school bill until the foreign aid bill has been settled, which will probably be sometime in middle or late August.

Delay Indicated

The indicated strategy, then, for supporters of school aid is to drag their feet and delay a showdown. For opponents of school aid the strategy is to try to force a showdown as soon as possible. The outlines of the tactics for both sides began to take shape last week almost immediately after the Rules Com-

mittee action. Opponents of the school bill introduced bills to extend the impacted areas program separately from general school aid. Chairman Powell of the Education and Labor Committee announced that his committee was not going to report such a bill. The opposition filed what is called a "discharge petition" to bring an impacted areas bill to the floor of the House without action by the Education Committee. This will require the signatures of 219 members, a majority of the House. The aim of the Administration will be to try to keep members who are supporters of both general aid and aid to impacted areas from signing the discharge petition, at least until the Administration is ready to deal with the question.

Supporters of the school bill hold an advantage in tactical position that is normally held by their opponents. Congressional procedure makes it far easier to delay something controversial than to speed it up, and in this case it is the liberals rather than the conservatives who are in no rush to act. If the discharge petition succeeds and a separate impacted areas bill is put through the House, a showdown can still be delayed until it is convenient for the Administration. In the Senate, supporters of school aid appear to be in full control. This makes it unlikely that a bill covering only impacted areas would get through the Senate. The House could then ask for a conference to work out a compromise between the House bill and the bill the Senate has already passed, which includes the controversial general aid as well as impacted areas aid. But the conference could then be stalled for whatever supporters of school aid feel is an appropriate length of time, at which time the conferees could report a compromise bill embodying most of what the Administration wants.

The real problem of supporters of the school bill is to get the House to accept a conference report containing the Administration proposals. This will be a difficult task, as everyone has known it would be all along. The Rules Committee action last week added a bit more flavor to the elaborate game of high politics that will decide the fate of this bill, but it never was likely to be decisive. For if, with the leverage available through the impacted areas program, the Administration lacked the strength to force a bill to a vote despite the Rules Committee, it almost certainly

would have lacked the strength to push the bill through the House even if the Rules Committee had cooperated. Indeed the Rules Committee may even have helped a bit, for now if the bill does reach the floor, it will not do so as part of a widely publicized and widely criticized bargain with the parochial school bloc.

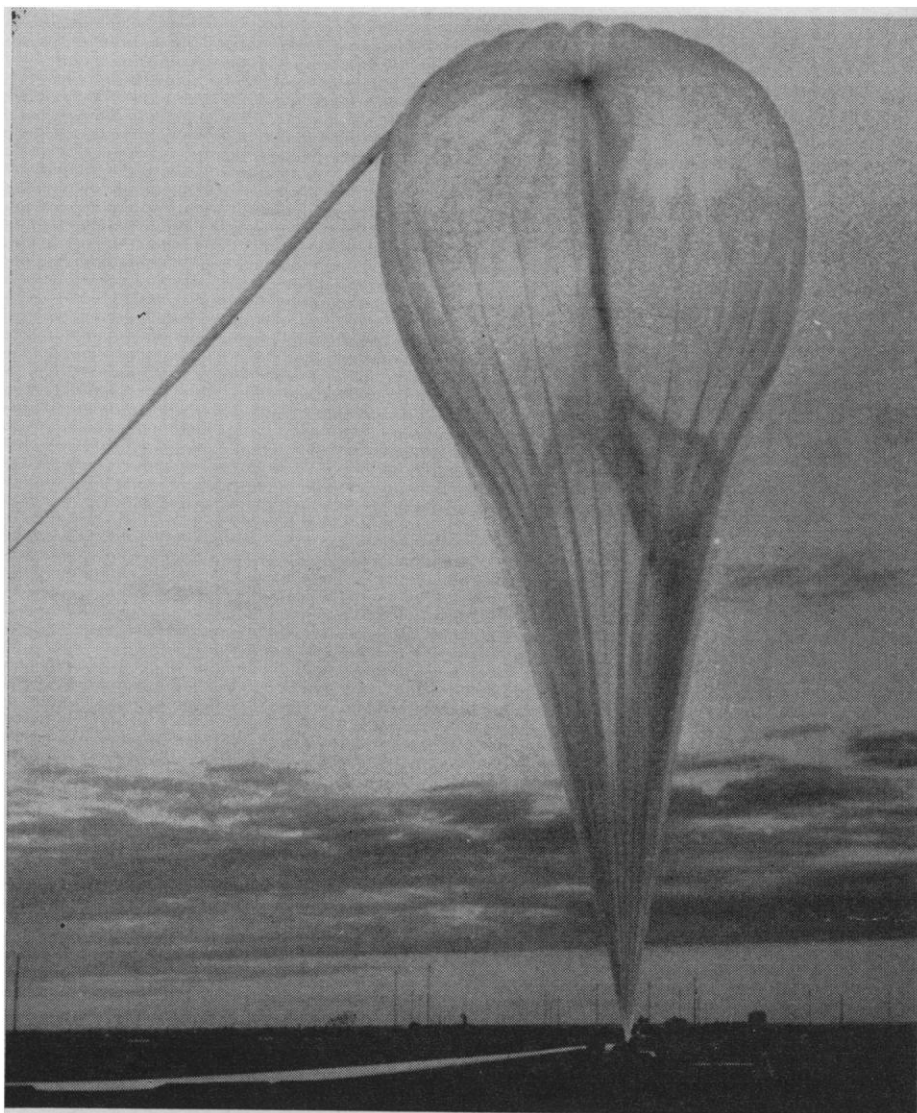
As for the outcome, a great deal depends, as has been widely noted, on what the President is prepared to do. What the President does depends a good deal on what the general political situation will be in September and, to a large extent, on whether he feels that anything he could do would be enough to carry the day. At this point it is the critics of general school aid who are glowing with optimism, and it may turn out that their optimism is justified.—H.M.

News Notes

Project Banshee

Weather and winds finally permitted this week the first in a series of 10 firings in Project Banshee, the Department of Defense research program to study the blast-wave effects of explosives detonated from balloons at 38,000 to 115,000 feet. The way was cleared for the actual firings to begin when, after five tries, the second dry run was successfully made last week.

The balloon (see cut) was launched into a high-altitude wind stream that carried it and its 200-foot train of instruments and 500 pounds of conventional high explosives over the 4000-square mile White Sands Missile Range in the New Mexico desert. Air Force planes



Banshee balloon: the plastic balloons vary in size according to altitude desired. Some are as long as a football field. [Department of Defense]