

**THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AND  
EDUCATION: AN EXAMINATION OF THE  
FEDERALIZATION MOVEMENT IN THE  
LIGHT OF THE EDUCATIONAL DEMANDS  
OF A DEMOCRACY; A DISSERTATION**

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The Federal Government and Education: An Examination of the Federalization Movement in the Light of the Educational Demands of a Democracy; a dissertation by Robert H. Mahoney

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**ROBERT H. MAHONEY**

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BY  
**ROBERT H. MAHONEY**  
KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS SCHOLAR

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**A DISSERTATION**

*Submitted to the Faculty of Philosophy of the Catholic  
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Doctor of Philosophy*

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**WASHINGTON, D. C.  
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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The era in which society now finds itself is conspicuously one of stress. Out of the vortex of a world-wide war which threatened to undermine the very structure of society and to render desolate and void the accumulated treasures of the race, there has developed in the minds of men a critical attitude, a spirit of challenge, and of keen penetrating inquiry into the foundations of the existing social economy. No institution has escaped the test; the school, the church, the state, the home,—all have been placed on trial, and all are being weighed in the balance of public opinion. Out of the babel of confusion that exists on all sides, discrepant voices are heard. On one side it is the voice of the conservative, firm in the conviction that the present order is inherently sound, and that its ills can be assuaged by the wise and benevolent administration of constructive reform. On the other side lifts the voice of the extreme reformer feverishly proclaiming the doctrine of radical change and insistently defending the thesis that revolution, not evolution, is the sesame to a more benign and equitable order.

Society, then, is in flux. It is becoming extremely self-conscious and critical. Novel interpretations of life and its meaning, new evaluations of society and its institutions are being offered in abundance. That modern society has accomplished marvels in the harnessing of the forces of nature and the building of an imposing material civilization, there is none to gainsay. That it has secured like triumphs in the domain of the spirit, there are few to admit. Shibboleths are the fashion of the hour. Democracy is a word to be conjured with. Americanization is being misunderstood and exploited; in many quarters it assumes a sinister guise and is regarded with suspicion. Education is hailed as a panacea; legislation receives a disproportionate valuation, and progress is not uncommonly identified with change.

The problems of the hour are at once manifold and complex. Their relations are well-nigh limitless, their difficulties well-nigh inexhaustible. However much therefore the many current issues may appeal to intelligent leadership or absorb the mind of the general student, it shall be the aim of this dissertation to limit the field of observation and to focus attention on the school in its relation to the federal government, *and to trace first of all the evolution of national interest in education;*



secondly, to examine the present trend in Federal educational legislation; and finally, in a review of the educational demands of a democracy, to see how far national control and direction operate to the welfare of the American school.

It is a truism that every society tends to perpetuate itself; likewise that every cultivated society sees in education the chief means of its perpetuation and an indispensable mechanism of social control. Under democratic forms this truth conveys a special meaning. Democracy has an abiding faith in education. Its very existence depends upon a wide diffusion of knowledge among its members. Its mainstay is a moral, social, and educated electorate. Where ignorance thrives, free institutions must inevitably fail. Autocracy thrives where minds are held in bondage.

The great ideal of democracy is harmony both in the internal and external relations of the group. It assumes that human nature is not fundamentally vicious; it rests its faith on the internal forces of the individual and on his capacity for enlightened moral co-operation. It finds its chief support not in the strong arm of government or the watchful eye of surveillance, but in the self-reliance of the individual, and in his fund of spiritual and moral loyalties. Its call is the call to service and self-surrender; due subordination and devotion to the common good are its perennial requisites.

The test of the school then will lie in its contribution to democracy. That the test is acid, and that the challenge to the American school is earnest and fundamental, are apparent upon the most cursory review of educational literature. With President Butler all educators are agreed that "the difficulties of democracy are the opportunities of education."<sup>1</sup> Have our schools measured up to their opportunities? Are they laggard in their service to democracy? Thus the crucial test is being fearlessly administered.

On all sides the lessons of the war are being formulated. Almost daily comes new report of the dangers of democracy that lurk within our doors. The extent of our national illiteracy startles us; the results of the draft prove a revelation, and a national emergency in education is said to exist.

"There are in the United States nearly 6,000,000 persons over 10 years of age unable to read or write (700,000 of them young men who were liable to recent draft laws). Fifty-eight per cent of these illiterates are white persons; 28 per cent are native-born whites, and 30 per cent are foreign-born whites; 40 per cent of the rest are negroes.

<sup>1</sup> Butler, Nicholas Murray, *The Meaning of Education*, New York, 1898, p. 180.

"To educate all of its people without exception is both the duty and the right of democracy. If these people have been deprived of educational opportunities in their youth, it is the duty of the Nation to extend this blessing to them now in their years of majority; if these people have neglected their earlier opportunities, democracy has the right to demand that they correct the deficiency with public assistance at once."<sup>2</sup>

In the words of Franklin K. Lane, late Secretary of the Interior, an "uninformed democracy is not a democracy."<sup>3</sup> Without a wide diffusion of knowledge, progressive democracy, social cohesion, community of ideals and sentiments are equally unthinkable. Without a mentally alert plebscite, the demagogue supplants the leader and odious political forms from autocracy to mobocracy are quick to seize dominion.

The situation is obvious, and the investigation reveals the many ills that endanger the body social. Out of the many nostrums that have been prescribed, society must make a choice. That social health may ensue, the group must employ the trained physician. The social diagnosis complete, the remedy must be appropriate. Neither the wholesomeness of the group nor the weal of its individual members should be impaired in the treatment.

To insure the stability of our institutions, the conviction is widespread that educational reform is imperative, and that the Federal Government must take a prominent part in the reconstruction movement. The fact is emphasized that the individual is not simply a citizen of his community or State, but of the nation as well.<sup>4</sup> From this it is concluded that the nation should assume a more generous share of the burden involved in the education of its citizens. That this conviction is taking a firm hold on our national leaders is plainly indicated in current legislative procedure. During the Sixty-sixth Congress there were pending at least ninety-four bills and joint resolutions bearing in some manner on education,<sup>5</sup> and the belief exists that "relatively few persons outside of Congress are aware either of the multiplicity of the legislative proposals, or of the manifest consequences which some of them would entail if enacted into law."<sup>6</sup> Doubtless a similar number of proposals will be introduced in the course of the present (Sixty-seventh) Congress.

<sup>2</sup> *A Manual of Educational Legislation*, United States Bureau of Education, Bulletin, 1919, No. 4, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> *Annual Report*, Department of the Interior, Washington, 1918, Vol. I, p. 30.

<sup>4</sup> Claxton, P. P., *Addresses and Proceedings*, N. E. A., 1919, Vol. LVII, P. 87.

<sup>5</sup> *The Educational Record*, Vol. I, No. 1, p. 4, and Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 41.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, No. 1, p. 4.

New Federal educational legislation is imminent, and the reflective mind is bound to ask: To what extent may legislation and social regimentation be said to be conducive to the best interests of democracy? Are the problems of democracy to be solved by placing our reliance on external compulsions and attractive short-cut processes fostered by the subsidy or directed by the controlling hand of the nation? Do we really know what democracy means, and if so, is our faith in it vital and abiding and not a sham? Are we, as one writer says, in danger of preserving the externals and killing the essentials of democracy?<sup>7</sup>

American public education is at the crossroads and its future course must be determined. In this, as in all matters affecting public policy, it is well to look before and after. A society such as ours, restless, dynamic, stripling, and impulsive, may well take pause on the stream of change lest peril overtake it. The doctrine that the inevitable tendency in the evolution of political and social forms is toward an ever increasing degree of centralization finds ample expression in current sociological and educational literature; indeed, it is borne out most clearly in the facts of modern industrial life. It cannot be maintained, however, that in this centripetal drift society is at the mercy of blind and fatalistic forces. Society can and must ponder over the problems of democracy; it must summon up its collective wisdom for the solution of its difficulties. The problems are not easy; their solution demands the best that is in us. They deserve the counsel of our united leadership and the intelligent interest of our citizenry. Social salvation shall be the reward of both faith and works.

<sup>7</sup> Cope, Henry Frederick, *Education for Democracy*, New York, 1930, p. 272.