

The Church of England



a new
education
act

A NEW EDUCATION ACT

The National Society and the Secretary of State for Education have together submitted their first comments to the Secretary of State for Education and Science in response to his invitation to the Churches and other bodies to express their views on a proposed new education act. The Church of England bodies made detailed observations on, and suggestions about, existing legislation and certain important areas of concern. The following is the preface—Some General Considerations—to the detailed comment, and is now printed as part of the Education Sunday material because of the general indication it gives of the Church's approach to future educational legislation.

The Church of England is committed to the education service as a whole, including special education and youth service, and its concern is with the educational needs of all. It entirely endorses the principle stated in the second part of Section 7 of the 1944 Education Act which points to the duty of a Local Education Authority "to contribute towards the spiritual, moral, mental and physical development of the community."

The bodies submitting evidence believe that statutory provision should make for genuine equality of educational opportunity. In that connection they urge that statutory provision, where appropriate, should implement the proposals made by the Newsom Committee in the report "Half our Future." They wish to emphasise this overall concern, believing for example that "provision of facilities for recreation and social and physical training," specified in Section 53 of the 1944 Education Act, is as proper an object of Christian responsibility as those Sections in the Act which deal with religious education.

For the Church of England, however, the existence of the dual system within the maintained sector affords a special opportunity for the practical application of the general concern. This in no way diminishes the overall educational concern of the Church, but it can be asserted in the light of experience that the voluntary schools exemplify in a special way, and in a workable form, one realisation of the Church's educational duty to the nation. The primacy of the word "educational" is again emphasised here.

The relevant evidence points to the probable continuation of the dual system. The Church of England believes that the partnership between the voluntary bodies and the state, given constitutional form in the 1944 Act, should be given statutory confirmation in new legislation. The comments which are made on existing legislation assume the continuation of the essential forms of the present system. The Church of England looks to the future with confidence because of its considerable experience of the working-out of the 1944 settlement, and in that connection it pays a very warm tribute to the officers of the Department of Education and Science, who through the years have assisted the

voluntary bodies in the complexities of legal, financial and other problems, in planning and in many policy matters. The Church of England bodies set on record their deep appreciation of the spirit in which the Department of Education and Science has approached the partnership. Gratitude is also owed to those many Local Education Authorities who have contributed constructively towards the effective working of the dual system. A second reason for confidence in the future is the fact that the various Churches have now in large measure a common mind on educational matters. In 1944 common ground had to be discovered; in 1969 it is evident. Some statutory provisions should be refashioned to accord with the present temper.

On the provisions for religious instruction and worship the two bodies wish in this introductory section to state one thing only, namely that in their view statutory provisions should continue, but that some variation in their precise form should be discussed. They believe that public opinion is in principle largely in favour of retaining the existing provisions, though some revision in detail is required, chiefly to accord with the realities of the present-day educational scene. Teachers' rights of conscience must be fully respected. Parents should have the right on the one hand to withdraw their children from the statutory provisions, and on the other to ensure for them a particular kind of religious education when it is available.

The Church of England Board of Education and the National Society acknowledge that the future effective workings of the dual system depend to a great extent on the capacity of the voluntary bodies to meet their legal and financial obligations in a constantly evolving educational scene. They recognise that achievements since 1944 have been made possible largely by the decision of the legislature in 1959 and 1967 to increase grants to meet rising costs. In the conviction that continuing obligations will be accepted, they indicate those areas where new legislation should re-enact what experience has proved to be right, and those other areas where experience has also indicated the need for revision, amendment, removal of anomalies and the rationalisation of provisions and procedures.

