

# Toward Freedom

By DOXEY WILKERSON

**T**HE demagogic double-play by which Republican Senators succeeded last week in killing the federal-aid-to-education bill (S. 637) is replete with legislative lessons for the Negro people and all other true progressives. The trickery by which this bill was defeated not only exposes the cynical disregard of the Republican leadership for the welfare of the Negro people and of public education in general; it also reveals the ease with which confused liberals are beguiled into the support of reaction.



Last Wednesday's Senate vote on the proposed "Educational Finance Act of 1943" was the climax of nearly a decade of struggle for federal subsidies to help states provide more adequate and more equal educational opportunities for millions of American children, especially in the South. The bill proposed a meager annual appropriation of \$300,000,000. Of this total, \$200,000,000 was for the purpose of raising teachers' salaries and employing additional teachers, thus checking the alarming wartime exodus of teachers to better-paying jobs. The remaining \$100,000,000 was "for the purpose of more nearly equalizing public elementary and public secondary school opportunities among and within the States."

In clear and specific language, the bill prohibited any federal control or supervision over school personnel, administration, or instructional programs, but required full financial accounting to assure that states used the money for the purposes stated. The bill also guaranteed that separate Negro schools in the South would share equitably in the proposed federal educational funds.

The Negro school safeguard of the bill provided that, in order to receive funds "in states where separate public schools are maintained for separate races," the state legislature must "provide for a just and equitable apportionment of such funds for the benefit of public schools maintained for minority races, without reduction of the proportion of State and local moneys expended for . . . public schools for minority races." A "minority race" was defined as one "that constitutes a minority of the

## Republican Demagoguery And Negro Education

population of the continental United States." A "just and equitable apportionment" of the federal educational funds was defined as any plan by which the proportion spent for schools for minority racial groups would be "not less than the proportion that each such minority racial group in such State bears to the total population of that State."

Despite its small appropriation, passage of S. 637 would have meant longer school terms, less crowded classes, better teachers, and improved educational opportunities generally for millions of American children. It would have been a God-send to the neglected children and exploited teachers in the segregated Negro schools of the South. Moreover, by preventing any additional discrimination in the expenditure of state and local school funds, and by requiring a "just and equitable" division of the proposed federal funds, it would have narrowed the big gap which now exists between the educational opportunities of southern white and Negro citizens. This was, indeed, a progressive bill.

S. 637 had the active support of organized labor (with a notable exception), northern and southern state school administrators, national and state educational associations and Negro organizations throughout the country. Even the southern Senators, who several years ago opposed the provision safeguarding Negro schools, were now united in support of the bill. Major opposition came from big business and taxpayers associations, some of the Catholic hierarchy, and the small clique of defeatist Senators, mostly Republican, who seize every opportunity to oppose progressive win-the-war legislation.

It was clear that in a straight-out vote, the coalition in support of the bill would win. Thus it was that the opposition resorted to trickery. Demagogically insisting upon even greater safeguards for Negro schools, the Senate Republican leadership called into play the old legislative device of amending a bill to "perfection" in order to insure its defeat.

*In his column tomorrow Doxey Wilkerson will conclude his discussion of the successful maneuvers of the reactionary Republicans in relation to the federal-aid-to-education bill (S. 637).*