

REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

BAPTIST JOINT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC AFFAIRS



The American Baptist Convention
The Southern Baptist Convention
The National Baptist Convention of America
The National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc.
The North American Baptist General Conference
The Baptist General Conference of America



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INTEREST RATES ON "GOVERNMENT LOANS"

The interest rate on housing loans to colleges is going up. The formula established by Congressional action in 1955 determined that such loans would bear an interest rate dependent on the cost of money to the government.

Such notes or other obligations as the Secretary of the Treasury might sell on the money market to obtain funds for the loan contracts with colleges are to carry interest which is not more than the higher of (1) $2\frac{1}{2}\%$ per annum, or (2) the "average annual interest rate on all interest bearing obligations of the United States then forming part of the public debt as computed at the end of the fiscal year", to the nearest $1/8$ of 1%. To this rate which is paid by the government, the Administrator in making loans to institutions is to add $1/4$ of 1% for administrative expense.

When the Secretary of the Treasury took his "average" at the close of the fiscal year, an increase from $2\frac{7}{8}\%$ to 3% resulted from the automatic formula.

Proposals in both Senate and House would have increased the interest rate on college housing loans to $3\frac{1}{2}\%$, but the Housing Act of 1957 as passed by both Houses of Congress and signed by the President continued the present formula.

Since these loans are normally relayed by the Treasury to the loan market, the "tight-money" situation is reflected in the new loans as higher interest rates.

Senator Homer E. Capehart (R.-Ind.) has offered a bill (S. 2427) to establish a blanket policy for all loans made by the Treasury to any department or agency of the Federal Government. The Secretary of the Treasury would fix the rate "taking into consideration the current average market yields of outstanding marketable obligations of the United States having maturities comparable to the loans made by the department or agency." Regardless of rates established in previous actions, loans would not be permitted at a rate below that established by the Treasury at the time the department or agency makes the loan plus an additional amount deemed adequate to cover administrative expense.

As long as loans are being made by government agencies to church-related welfare agencies, the relationship of those interest rates to the cost of money to the Treasury remains the chief measure of the extent of religious participation exacted from the taxpayer by law.

A NEW RESOLUTION

Our traditional Baptist interest in religious liberty found expression recently in a resolution adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention at Chicago. The vocabulary of the resolution is worthy of careful attention:

"Whereas our Baptist churches have developed on the basis of an emphasis on the voluntary personal response to the inner compulsion of the Holy Spirit,

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leading men to faith in Jesus Christ, and

"Whereas history has demonstrated often and in numerous and large areas of the world that religious persuasion or coercion by the use of political power engenders antagonistic attitudes toward the churches and the Christian message,

"Therefore be it resolved:

"1. That we reaffirm our devotion to the voluntary principle of religious commitment;

"2. That we declare anew our devotion to the principle of religious liberty for all people everywhere;

"3. That we urge the agencies and the churches throughout this convention by both word and example to make known our Baptist aversion to any effort to use the administrative, legislative, or judicial powers of government to lay the weight of a feather upon the conscience of any man in the realm of religion, by privilege or penalty."

A NEW LOBBY BILL

Senator John L. McClellan (D.-Ark.) (et al.) has introduced a bill, S. 2191, to amend the "Federal Regulation of Lobbying Act", which was voted as Title III of the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946. Eleven years of history have demonstrated the need for improved handling of this aspect of the legislative process. The new bill is submitted in behalf of a special committee.

The McClellan bill proposes a new Title III, "Legislative Activities Disclosure Act." It places its emphasis on the reporting of the facts regarding legislative activity and expenditures. Regarding its own intent, the bill says:

"Congress finds, however, that the preservation and maintenance of the integrity of the legislative process requires the identification in certain instances of persons and groups who seek to influence the passage or defeat of legislation by appealing to the

Congress directly, or by artificial stimulation of the public intended to produce direct communications with the Congress. It is the purpose of this Act to require full disclosure in order to make available to the Congress and the public information relative to the activities, receipts and expenditures for such purposes, and the source of funds of persons who seek to influence the passage or defeat of legislation by such means."

The requirements of the bill with reference to reporting and record keeping apply to:

"(a) Any person who is required to file a notice of representation under this Act;

"(b) any person who employs or retains one or more legislative agents and who makes an expenditure of \$300 or more in any calendar quarter to influence legislation;

"(c) any person who received \$300 or more in a calendar quarter as compensation, reimbursed expenses (exclusive of personal travel expenses), or both, for the purpose of influencing legislation by direct communication....;

"(d) any person who requests or procures any other person to communicate directly with Congress to influence legislation by means of a communication which does not show on its face the identity of the person who requested or procured such communication if:

"(1) such request or procurement is in writing and is addressed to or distributed to more than one thousand persons; or

"(2) the expense of the communication requested or procured is paid or agreed to be paid by the person making the request or procurement, and more than twenty-five persons are solicited to make such a communication;

"(e) any person who has made expenditures exceeding \$50,000 in the aggregate within the preceding twelve months, in presenting a program addressed to

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the public, a substantial portion of which is intended, designed, or calculated to influence legislation."

(Note: "any person" means any individual or organization.)

The provisions of the bill specifically do not apply to:

"(a) the publication or dissemination, in the ordinary course of business, of news items, advertising, editorials or other comments by a newspaper, book publisher, regularly published periodical, radio or television station (including an owner, editor or employee thereof)."

Official actions and campaign propaganda are also excluded.

Most public reactions to the revision have been favorable up to the present time. Some concern has been expressed by the business community, saying that it is so drastic as to penalize "trade publications" that defend particular industries.

Discussions have noted that this bill proposes to designate an administrator of the lobby law, the Comptroller General. The old law has no administrator. Another innovation of the bill is that it includes "indirect lobbying", which many recognize as the most potent type.

Legislative agents would be subject to criminal penalties (\$10,000 and five years) for falsifying reports, for sending fictitious communications to Congress, and for failing to register or to file reports. Other violations would be subject to civil court action demanding compliance.

Church groups will normally be interested in S. 2191 from two viewpoints. The bill aims to make the "facts" known and so to prevent corruption in government. The question on this point is, will this do the job?

While there is no apparent reason to be apprehensive of the measure from the viewpoint of rights and liberties, it does bear on the electorate's "right

of petition" and is accordingly worthy of the most careful study.

THE CENSUS AND RELIGION

Imagine yourself in your living room as the government census-taker opens his big book, and asks, "What is your religion?"

Has a violation of separation of church and state occurred? Has religious liberty been compromised?

A variety of viewpoints have been expressed recently on these questions. The Census Bureau has been sounding public opinion, seeking to decide whether the question should be in the 1960 census.

In a letter which appeared in the New York Times on July 8, 1957, Rabbi Israel Goldstein, president of the American Jewish Congress, expressed opposition. His statement pointed to our traditional American aversion, since the days of Madison, arguing that "such questions would violate the constitutional guarantee of freedom of religion." He pointed out that it is a criminal offense to refuse to answer; and that to classify Americans "in categories of religious and non-religious and sub-categories of sect and denomination" is alien to our tradition. Also, he felt that it would violate separation of church and state since the data gathered would be for the benefit of religious organizations.

Thomas B. Kennedy, editor, the Official Catholic Directory, promptly countered with a statement contending that the information was for business purposes, and that statistics on churches have been gathered at various times previously. He cited the American Civil Liberties Union's approval of 1956.

The American Civil Liberties Union immediately announced that their position has been changed since it became known that a refusal to answer a census question is a crime punishable by imprisonment or fine. They now stand in opposition on the basis of the First Amendment's provisions that (1) "Congress shall make no law....prohibiting

the free exercise" of religion, and (2) "Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion." An inquiry made by a government official, they contend, "might for some persons under some circumstances be an infringement upon freedom of religion."

Paul Blanchard then suggested that the question be one of actual church affiliation, and be made fully voluntary. Mr. Blanchard apparently did not recognize that a voluntary question would open the way to selective factors and to questionable interpretations.

The Commonweal, a Roman Catholic magazine, opposed the question editorially, while the directors of the Catholic Daughters of America voted to work for it.

From our viewpoint the question, "What is your religion?" seems objectionable. It assumes religion, just as we assume all other sociological data. It would elicit a meaningless response from many.

In most European national traditions "the church" was the keeper of "vital statistics", including births, deaths, marriages, catechetical examinations, communion attendance, and the like. Our American tradition has divorced "vital statistics" from the "church statistics", leaving the one with the governments and the other with the churches. That division has greatly extended the freedom of the person and greatly enhanced the spiritual effectiveness of the churches. It is worth keeping.

The need for accurate religious data, however, is real. "Church statistics" are so lacking in uniformity that confusion prevails. While Baptists aim to count only adult "baptized believers" as church members and tend to frown on churches with "inactives" on their rolls, the Roman Catholic position is that once an infant is baptized as a Catholic he is always a Catholic.

The difference appeared most clearly in "The Question Box" of the Tablet,

Brooklyn diocesan paper, March 2, 1957:

"Q. On a TV interview, I heard a Baptist minister give figures on the numbers of Catholics who were converted to Protestant religions in a given period of time. When a person is baptized a Catholic, isn't he a Catholic always even though he joins up with a Protestant church?

"A. Yes. The catechism describes one of the effects of Baptism as 'imprinting an indelible character on the soul.' That means that a person baptized in the Catholic Church can no more change the character of his life than one born of royal blood could become one born of common blood. Unfortunately, through neglect, weakness or downright apostasy, a person can fail or refuse to live up to the dignity, the standard and the obligations of a member of the Mystical Body of Christ (like the Prodigal Son), but he still remains a member of that body, albeit, an unworthy one. Baptism is not the initiation of a person into a club or an organization which the member can leave later if he so wishes. It is the ceremony of re-birth in the Holy Ghost, making the person the living member of a living Body, the Mystical Body of Christ. Even with defect of faith after Baptism, the character of the sacrament remains. Hence, loss of faith is so great a tragedy."

The result is that there is no way of knowing how many people are counted both as Roman Catholics and as Protestants--as Roman Catholics because they were baptized there as infants, and as Protestants because they later affiliated with a Protestant church.

For many others "religion" is akin to an Irish or a Jewish national background. The person who answers "Jewish" may be speaking of ethnic background or of religious convictions. Furthermore, the occasional visitor to a Baptist church in a community of Baptists will probably say "Baptist." Not a few of these will ask the census taker what his question means. He will not know, but if he did know and could explain, his visit would certainly violate our constitution.