
CURRENT SCIENCE—50 YEARS AGO

Educational Reform

ACCORDING to the Press report published recently the Government of India is contemplating the appointment of a special committee to suggest reforms in the present educational syllabuses and methods, as a sequel to the report of the Sapru Unemployment Committee. The special committee is proposed to be assisted in its deliberations by two or more British experts on technological education. In the meantime the Central Government is considering the report of the Sapru Committee with a view to discover the extent and direction of the application of its proposals for relieving unemployment, in the light of the opinions received from the provinces. The main conclusion of the Sapru Committee is that the problem of unemployment will ultimately be solved by the institution of more technical schools, and by the improvement and adaptation of the existing system of education to the needs of a growing community.

Although the problem of unemployment is not directly connected with the existing system of education, yet it has not kept pace with the spirit of the modern tendencies in public life. The conception of a New World which the Constitutional Reforms will shortly introduce, is stored, with riches waiting for the Minister of Education to be explored, assimilated and turned to national account. Before him lie the greatest possibilities of the future, perhaps the most fascinating prospect of a great creative effort and an endless field of achievement. Education, interpreted in a broader sense than any acknowledged by its professors, is not at present the dominant concern of the State. The dominant interests of the public are the economic and the political, and education revolves as a dark subsidiary planet in a distant orbit round these self-important bodies. But real and important as they are, they have very little claim to dominate the life of the community for ever. It is this subordinate position into which education has been forced, which must account for the retardation of progress in the country. In the coming order of social and political system for whose appearance the new Reforms have raised hopes, education should be an equal partner in a community

of interests. As long as education is made to give way to the demands of politics and economics, which we may arrange into the League of Nations, individualism or socialism, so long we shall make no headway, but rather reinstate on another level the social evils we are trying to cure on this. The fortunes of the community do not depend on the rearrangement of the political and economic puzzle. They lie in another region, the minds and characters of the citizens which are the fundamental assets of the State. The educational reform to which we look forward is the creation for education a position where, though it may not claim to dominate politics and economics, it shall not permit itself to be dominated by them. It should have the rights and privileges of Dominion Status in the Commonwealth of State interests, in order that its genius might develop on its own lines, freed from the tangle of other departments and the electioneering vicissitudes of party politics.

But as things now are, the control of education is tied up to the wheels of the political chariot, and whatever disasters overtake this chariot, they are immediately reflected in a corresponding injury to the interests of education. The more intelligent section of the public has not visualised the anomaly of a Minister of Education, who has set on foot what is practically a life's work, being thrown out of office, because the party to which he belongs has come to grief in the elections on totally different ground, and his successor, not being interested in his ideas, pulling to pieces the far-reaching plans laid by the defunct member. It is this egregiously vicious system of collective responsibility of the cabinet, which has arrested the development of education, by being associated with interests of a lower level of value. Political vicissitudes break its continuities and discredit its significance. The first step in the educational reform, as we conceive it, is to free the management of its affairs from the baleful political exigencies, and education must cease to be a party product.

The second stage in the process of reform is to abolish from the theory and practice of education the pernicious idea that it has a tripartite division, elementary, secondary and higher, arranged in order of importance, and designed for the different classes of

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people. The growth of the human mind is continuous and, whatever agency is employed to promote its development, it must be a unitary whole. A great deal of intellectual snobbishness has arisen by treating education as distinct compartments, which, on the other hand, must be conceived as the bond of union which embraces the mind in its entirety. The human mind is not conscious of its own divisions corresponding to the three grades, which, however necessary for administrative purposes, represent only a common enterprise. The conception of education as a unitary process of civilising the human mind amounts practically to the elimination of the examination system. We have assigned to examination a value far greater and more important than really belongs to its function and purpose. This hand maiden now dominates and overshadows the entire household of education, which has quietly receded into the background and its restoration to its proper position of the legitimate mistress is a measure of reform which must necessarily follow the change of our conception of its ideals and functions, as the greatest reconciling element in social life. In the mansion of education, there is a single story, which may be many-sided but still single.

The present system of education is not, as is commonly and frequently criticised, rooted in the life of the people. Its purpose is not relevant to their needs. It is the creation of Government to suit the special needs of administration. It supports their interests and embodies their prejudices. It brings a foreign culture imposed upon the genius of the people from above by the ruling people who think that they know what is good for the country. The country suspects the motive behind it all. These criticisms are as familiar to us as the things by which we are surrounded from child-

hood. The people are undoubtedly keen for education, if it is good for something, but they are naturally indifferent to what is offered to them in the name of education leading their children nowhere. Education is mixed up with a multitude of other extraneous things, which have nothing to do with it, and of which people do not approve,—institutions and interests which in a very subtle but powerful way it bolsters up and perpetuates. They agree with everything we might tell them about the need and urgency of education, but the actual system and the purpose of education now in practice they distrust. This feeling which is undoubtedly widespread explains the prevailing indifference of the working classes to education. The reform of education must attack this indifference; it can do so only by making the schools so efficient and popular that children will cheerfully and of their own accord come to them, and will not willingly leave them. It is through children that education hopes to reach the parents and society, and it must be remembered that every child who leaves the school unwillingly is a missionary for education, and everyone who leaves it in a contrary frame of mind is a dangerous force on the other side.

We cannot enter here into all the general and special aspects of educational reform, but can only indicate its general principles and the future policy of its control and management. If we think of education in all its bearings and its nature, as lifelong, as interpenetrating all occupations, as teaching every man and woman of doing their work in a better and more intelligent way, as co-extensive with the entire field of social activities, then education should be autonomous in its own territory. This reform being effected, all else will follow.

NEWS

BAUXITE SLIME ROAD COATING WITHSTANDS PRESSURE WELL

Bauxite slime, the waste of aluminum production, could be used as an excellent material for building roads. According to specialists, bauxite slime, when properly treated, acquires very high strength. Bauxite slime was used to make the coating on the experimental road in Soviet Kazakhstan, built a year ago. It withstands the pressure of 150 kilograms per square centimetre. This largely enhances the reliability of

grade concrete. The construction of a plant to make bricks out of waste has begun at the Pavlodar Aluminium Works. Its annual capacity will be 120 million bricks a year (Soviet Features, Vol. XXV, No. 51, March 31, 1986. Information Dept., USSR Embassy in India, P. B. 241, Barakhamba Road, New Delhi 110001).