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Vocational Education in India.

THE intense agitation now proceeding in the educational world for reforming both its content and system is manifestly the outcome of the desire of the Government and of the intelligent section of the public to provide relief for the educated unemployed. The doctrine on which the reforms are proposed to be founded is that Education is at once the cause and cure of unemployment. If it is assumed that practically every educated young man should possess the necessary training and equipment for earning a living by his own unassisted exertions, then there is truth in the theory. If, on the other hand, he offers his skill and knowledge to be employed by other agents, then it is obvious that unless the power of these agents for absorbing all the output of educated men and women keeps pace with their multiplication, there is bound to be employment lag. Unemployment is the outward expression of the socio-economic conflict, and the severity of its manifestation is proportionate to the divergence of the interest of the State and those of its population. Where such divergence prevails, education in the universities and schools becomes monastic, secluded from the growing needs and realities of the highly

materialised civilisation. Existence, whether in human society or in a state of nature is competitive, and if, in the latter sphere, natural endowments and acquired training are a means of success in the struggle for life, then education in the former cannot afford to be decorative appendage, where the struggle is equally keen. The necessity for the provision of reasonable opportunities for gaining a livelihood by individuals becomes all the more imperative in the community, from which the natural factors controlling its size are at least partially eliminated. If the growth of society is permitted to outstrip its economic property, it is obvious that unemployment must inevitably result, unless the needs of the population are identified with those of the State, by the totalitarian claims of national socialism.

The problem of unemployment is somewhat complicated in India, and even if the Western countries could discover means for its solution, its unravelling in this country must baffle the genius of any statesman. Through her long political dependency, India has lost the power of initiative; through her population being split into horizontal strata of castes, she has divided labour on

the basis of this order; through almost a traditional concentration of the ablest talents of her people in restricted spheres of public life, her industries have not prospered,—though there must have been other contributory causes for their undeveloped condition; through her policy of restricting admission of competent Indians into certain departments of public service and of racial differences of preferment in others, overcrowding of subordinate branches of service and the consequent overflow must be the inevitable result.

We have before us the Abbott-Wood report on Vocational Education in India and the Wardha Scheme of vocational education. The latter has eclipsed the importance of the former which has been produced at great expense to the public. The Wardha Report is definitely optimistic, and its authors and supporters are absolutely clear that if its proposals are courageously followed, all the young men and women who have passed through the basic education will have received sufficient vocational training to set up independent gainful occupations. We are familiar with the criticisms of the Scheme. Perhaps, some of the more fundamental defects may be remedied as experience and knowledge are gained. Perhaps the scheme will succeed if governments and local bodies purchase the products of the pupils and teachers' handiwork, and distribute them among school and district museums or create an emporium for their sale. The pupils will be most certainly happy so long as they remain at school. But they must ultimately enter the world, which has none of the tender solicitude and softness for its fresh recruits which they enjoyed during the school days. After their school days are left behind, will these young men and women, either individually or in joint corporation, have sufficient financial resources to set up even small-scale industries for which they have been trained. Assuming for the sake of argument that they have, can they reasonably hope to compete in the open market with similar articles of mass production. How will the general consumer react to the industries carried on in small undertakings? The soundness of any educational reconstruction is to be judged not by the academic perfection of its details, but by the success achieved by those who have received its benefits. At the present moment the critics and supporters of the Wardha

Scheme are very much concerned with the educational aspects of the systems but they do not seem to be troubled by the prospects awaiting its beneficiaries. If the attitude of the framers of the Scheme is that they can furnish manual skill and technical knowledge to those who seek for them, and that their responsibility does not extend to the post-school achievements of the scholars, then the Wardha schools must be as far removed from the concrete understanding of the social and economic facts of public life, as the much maligned present-day Universities and secondary schools are innocent of the realities of social and political developments in the country. At least in the case of the latter institutions, the worth of their education could be judged by the employability of the graduates and undergraduates, but in the case of the Wardha schools, we have a new criterion for judging the value of their vocational instruction, *viz.*, the independent industrial occupations which the pupils will establish for themselves as a means not only of their livelihood but also of their contribution to the public revenues. If the results of their knowledge and training are used by the Wardha pupils for purpose of employment in the larger industries, the problem of unemployment must still remain unsolved. It is, however, too premature to judge the merits of the Scheme which purports to be an experimental measure and the critics and advocates of this "Basic Education" must wait until it has justified the expectations of its authors.

If the Abbott-Wood report on vocational education in India is less pretentious, it is at least entitled to the praise of being an incisive analytical document. It should be remembered that education in India in all stages has all along been purely literary, without any direct reference to the needs of industry and commerce, and that the parents would prefer their children entering government service which offers security of tenure and prospects of rising to the highest posts by their industry and intelligence. It is by no means easy to convince such parents in India, that their sons might with greater advantage devote themselves to the accomplishments of educational aims which find ampler scope for their exercise and fulfilment in the industrial and technical occupations. It will always be the intention of pupils taking a vocational course of instruction to seek

for a career in a particular industry, and when they do not find it, they and their parents must be disappointed and discontented. What India wants is not an ideal scheme of vocational education, but a change of attitude of mind. Tradition and sentiment have invested the formal type of education with a glamour too strong to be resisted by young men, who, by entering Government service, hope to exercise powers of patronage and enjoy the dignity of official prestige, or, by entering the learned professions, aspire to amass wealth. This tendency for minimum exertion and maximum profit, naturally universal among the younger generation at all times, is directly encouraged by Indian parents, who have an eye on the social status of their children, which they are taught to associate with government posts. While theoretically admitting that labour intrinsically has no dignity except what is conferred upon it by the honesty and sincerity of the labourer, yet Indian society will, in its intercourse, make a difference between the mechanic and the mathematician,—not very flattering to the former.

In order that vocational instruction might succeed, it is imperative that Indian parents must recognise that labour has no caste. It is absolutely wrong to suppose that the benefits of vocational instruction must accrue only to the lower middle class and the poorer communities, whose children have neither the spirit to face an adventure, nor the resources to encounter frustrated hopes, on the success or failure of which their whole fortunes must depend. On the other hand, the children of the aristocracy and of the upper classes, must be compelled to adopt purposeful practical vocation as their principal calling in life. The principal aim of vocational education should be to produce a corps of workers who, besides possessing technical skill and knowledge, would have strongly developed personal qualities for organisation and leadership. The well-to-do communities must necessarily assist in raising such a team, lest vocational education should degenerate into "Class" education. The economic interests of India have grievously suffered from false notions of prestige, through the children of the aristocracy having been brought up to look upon manual labour as something ruinous to their social status, and as something specially

reserved for the lower order of society to pursue. No vocational school can be initiated and carried on with success if the children of the nation as a whole will not, for reasons of social prejudice and class-dignity, participate in their benefits. We should imagine that these institutions should receive and train the children of the ruling Princes also, who should not be ashamed to put on an overall, and accept any job of work along with their less fortunate class-mates. Such intimate association of the pupils drawn from all strata of society will invest labour with real dignity, and establish deeper understanding of mutual aspirations. In such a case the foundation of the future democratic government will be laid in the workshops of the vocational schools, which, on the other hand, developed on class basis, will certainly tend to preserve and promote class hatred. No community can be too great to learn a trade, or too foolish to realise that work is wealth.

Some of the difficulties which militate against the success of the technological and vocational schools are common with those found among the systems of public education, *viz.*, young men having taken post-graduate courses in Science are appointed to posts in the Railway and Police service. It is true that employment is obtained, but without any the remotest connection between the knowledge and training of the young men and the duties of the office they are embarking to discharge. There is bound to be a deep sense of frustration on the part of the employees, with the consequence of inefficiency. The misfits in public service are as much a concern of the public as their unemployment. In the case of candidates who have been trained in a particular department of industry or vocation, his failure to be employed in the special field must lead to graver consequences. If the pupils leaving the vocational schools do not expect to be absorbed in the industries, but are able to establish their own, on a small or large scale, then these schools will succeed in fulfilling the objects with which they are established. If, however, these pupils hunger and thirst for service, then the two problems, unemployment and misfits, will continue to engage the anxious consideration of the public and governments, presenting almost inseparable obstacles in the way of their solution.