

# Educational Reform In Canada and England

EDITOR'S NOTE: Earlier in the year two important documents on educational reform were published in Canada and England which if acted upon would greatly change the system of education in both countries. PUBLIC AFFAIRS has therefore asked two well known educationists to discuss the proposals put forward and to explain their implications.

## I

### A PROGRAM FOR CANADA

By A. S. MOWAT

IT has been said with truth that war provokes educational reform. This war is no exception. In at least four of the belligerent nations important changes in education have already been made or will be made in the near future. The most comprehensive scheme of reform yet proposed in any country is that issued by the British government in its white paper on "Educational Reconstruction." This sets out in detail the British government's plans for remodelling the whole educational system of England and Wales.

No such document has been issued or will be issued for Canada, where the control of education is expressly reserved to the Provinces by the British North America Act. There have recently been made public however the findings of a Dominion-wide survey, which was undertaken by the C.N.E.A. on the suggestion of Dr. F. Cyril James, Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Reconstruction. The C.N.E.A. or Canada and Newfoundland Education Association is the most representative educational body in Canada and numbers among its members representatives of all the Provincial Departments of Education, of the teachers, the Universities, the Normal Schools and other bodies engaged in educational work. In October, 1942, it appointed a Survey Committee "to meet the request of the Federal Committee on Reconstruction for a Dominion-wide report of educa-

tional needs and for recommendations in respect thereof."

The Committee has performed its task with thoroughness and discrimination. It has surveyed all fields of educational endeavour in Canada except University education, has set down in simple, clear and unequivocal terms the educational needs of the Dominion and has made definite recommendations.

In the Report the excellent plan has been followed of printing at the end of each chapter a summary of its findings and a list of recommendations, and at the end there have been summarized all of the findings and all of the recommendations. Although the writers of the Report modestly explain that time did not allow a fully objective study of the problem, the statements made in the summaries are I think incontrovertible, and few of the recommendations are likely to be questioned except by the self-interested or reactionary.

### Health

After the Introduction the Survey begins with a chapter on Health; and rightly so, for the sound health of school children is basic to education. While paying tribute to the health activities now carried on by Dominion, Provincial and local authorities and by voluntary bodies such as the Junior Red Cross, the Survey points out that heating, lighting, ventilation and sanitary conveniences are still very unsatisfactory in many schools, that the teaching of Health from books as a school subject usually fails to produce practical results and that the existing public services for

the nutrition and medical and dental examination and treatment of school children are quite inadequate in most areas. The recommendations include the provision for all schools of adequate medical, dental, nursing and immunization services, treatment of remediable conditions in school children, school lunches to correct diet deficiencies, and close cooperation between school authorities and public health authorities. The annual cost of over \$20,000,000 required to implement such a programme would surely not be too much to pay to ensure good health in the coming generation.

### Problems of Administration

Until recent years educational reform in all the Provinces was held up or hindered by out-of-date administrative machinery. It is still so held up and hindered in a majority of the provinces. The "district" or "section" system which in various forms was found until recently right across Canada originated in the days of sparse settlement and difficult communications which established the independent local community as the seat of the main financial and administrative control over education. But times have changed and will change further. Railways and paved highways, snowploughs and busses have revolutionized communication since the days of the horse and buggy. Some parts of Canada have become thickly, not thinly populated. The disparity of settlements in wealth and population has enormously increased and their interdependence magnified. The main result of adherence under changing conditions to the old system of administration has been the creation or exaggeration of the great inequalities of educational opportunity which now exist in Canada. Yet in the face of those inequalities, the most striking of which are those between urban and rural children, the administrative machinery in most provinces has so far only been tinkered with, not replaced. The Survey Committee makes four important recommendations, namely:—that larger units of local administration be set up, that the

number of inspectors and supervisors be increased and many helping teachers employed, that an equalization fund be established to aid the weaker school districts to offer better educational facilities, and that pupils living at a distance from school be provided with transportation or with living accommodation in hostels or boarding-houses.

Were those recommendations carried out, they would make it possible to offer rural children an education equal in quality to that at present offered in the best of our cities and would remove from Canadian education the existing glaring inequalities of opportunity. As the Survey Committee points out such reforms would also enable us to cope adequately with two important problems which will confront us in the immediate post-war period, the problem of building construction and that of redesigning and diversifying courses in the higher grades. It is obvious that new schools will have to be built; the curtailment of building during the war period alone makes that necessary. It is also very probable that children will stay longer at school. Indeed the Report advocates full time attendance for all children up to 16 years and part time attendance till 18. Under the present set-up those problems could be solved in cities and large towns, but higher education in thinly populated areas demands central or rural high schools, for only by their establishment can a variety of courses be taught by competent teachers. The establishment of such schools is enormously made easier by the administrative reforms already mentioned.

### The Teachers

It has sometimes been held in North America that, given good text-books and a sound and detailed course of study, almost anyone can teach school without previous training. The Survey Committee's Report emphatically and rightly rejects any such opinion and states that "prospective teachers should be the most capable and most promising young people graduating from our schools and colleges."

This is no less than the truth. The welfare of our children demands no less. Now many capable young people do enter the profession and many enjoy their work and do it well. But the girl of spirit who after two years teaching still has not been able to save enough to buy a new suit, and the young man who wants to get married but knows that on his teacher's salary he cannot possibly support a wife, don't stay very long in the schools. They get out into other more remunerative occupations. There is not the slightest doubt, as the figures in the Report demonstrate, that the majority of Canadian teachers are grossly underpaid considering the previous education and training demanded of them, the wages or salaries paid to other workers, and the importance of the work they do. The serious thing is that the children suffer, especially the children in rural areas where salaries are generally low. In such areas there is a very high proportion of inexperienced teachers, a very small proportion of men and a very rapid rate of shifting from position to position. Under such circumstances the poor showing of rural children in educational attainments (as found for example in the *Educational Survey* of King's County, N. S., conducted by me in 1941) is not to be wondered at. Canadians ought to pay higher salaries to their teachers, not only because of the essential justice of the teacher's case, but also because in this as in other transactions the best value is not always obtained by buying the cheapest.

The median salary of Canadian teachers is \$782 per annum; and 75 per cent of teachers receive less than \$1223 per annum. Without going into details the Survey Committee recommends that the salaries paid to teachers be increased until the median salary throughout the Dominion becomes \$1321 (a figure already reached in one province) and that the number of men teachers be increased till they reach 40 per cent of the total.

## Curricula

The longest and most controversial chapter is that on curricula. It deals with the many aspects of the pressing problem of what to do with the increased, and in post-war years the probably still more increasing, numbers of students in high school and college. This problem is best understood in its historical setting. Fifty years ago all Canadian children were expected to have an elementary education in the common schools. A few proceeded to high school where they were given an academic education based on mathematics and languages which prepared them for University. That minority has now become a majority, or will shortly so become. Yet on the whole, especially in the Maritimes, our high school curricula, though expanded and diversified, still in practice remain founded on the academic ideal. But the academic course is no longer suitable for many, perhaps the majority, of our high school students. To meet this need the Report recommends diversified curricula in high school, composite high schools centrally located for rural children, a wide extension of educational and vocational guidance, transportation facilities or subsistence allowances for children who live at a distance from the school they attend, scholarships for gifted children, more libraries for schools and a fuller use of radio and film. No one, I think, will quarrel with those recommendations nor with the recommendation that special educational facilities and equipment be offered to men and women returned from the services. It is debatable however whether Canada needs the 150 Junior Colleges or the 5,000 classes for gifted children, the establishment of which is recommended. Nor does the Chapter deal satisfactorily with the ticklish question of the selection of children for different types of courses nor their examination and certification at the completion of a course. For example, it does not seem wise to recommend that "Univer-

sities, normal schools, technical schools, agricultural colleges and other institutions of higher learning should accept for admission students who have completed any high school curriculum."

### Conclusion

Three brief final chapters deal with Adult Education, Voluntary Agencies and Finance. They recommend encouragement of the Voluntary Agencies, the extension of library service over the whole Dominion and continued support for the Canadian Association for Adult Education, together with the establishment of schemes and courses cooperatively by departments of education, local school boards, and university extension departments.

The chapter on Finance counts the cost of all the recommendations previously made and recommends certain steps to be taken to equalize the expenditure per child throughout Canada. (At present some provinces spend more than twice as much per child as others). The main recommendations are that local school boards be freed from capital expenditures, that school monies be secured from all sources where wealth is found and not only from levies on real property and that the present annual expenditure for education be doubled. Such expenditures may seem large, yet, as the Report affirms, they provide not for an ideal scheme of national education, but only for a very moderate practical advance well within the nation's reach as soon as war expenditures cease.

The C.N.E.A. Report is a survey, and, unlike the British White Paper, does not represent the intentions of any government. Nobody is bound by it; nobody need listen to it. But it is a mistake to suppose that Canadian educational authorities are unaware of the faults and shortcomings so clearly stated in the Report. On the contrary the Report expresses several trends of development along which advances have al-

ready been made by the Provincial Governments and others. In Nova Scotia, for example, we have had within the last two years the introduction of the Municipal Unit of Administration, the purchase by the Provincial Government of Shop-mobiles and Dental Trailers for school children, the establishment of Vocational Guidance in more than one centre, and other reforms. But reform in Nova Scotia, as elsewhere, has not gone nearly far enough. For this the public as well as governments are to blame. Progressive as well as reactionary politicians have been heard to complain that they can move no faster than public opinion. For this reason it behoves every citizen to study the recommendations made in the Report and in particular to consider whether he would not get a better return for his money if he paid more for his schools. The whole keynote of the Report is that every reform is designed solely to promote better education for our children, the future citizens of Canada. Such an appeal is made to the best and purest of our feelings.

## II

### TRANSFORMING ENGLISH EDUCATION

By H. C. DENT

THE WHITE PAPER entitled "Educational Reconstruction" (Cmd. 6458) which was issued by the Government of Britain on July 16 is one of the most revolutionary documents of our time, for it proposes nothing less than a complete remodelling of the publicly-provided education service in England and Wales. (The educational systems of Scotland and Northern Ireland are separately directed and administered, and so do not come within the scope of the White Paper,