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The Educational Advisory Board.

THE formation of a Central Advisory Board of Education, foreshadowed by Sir G. S. Bajpai at the last session of the Legislative Assembly at Delhi, is, in our opinion, an urgent necessity. In recent times, the academic problem has assumed new and perhaps complex shapes, and in its solution the Government of India might naturally desire to rely on the advice and assistance which this expert body is competent to place at their disposal. When Government abolished the Bureau of Education in 1923, their influence on the formation and execution of the educational policy of provinces practically disappeared and the new Board is obviously intended to restore that influence. It is desirable—means will no doubt be found for it—that the Educational Advisory Board should be so constituted that it will fit into the general framework of Federal Administration, since it is proposed to make it a department of Central Government. Otherwise the experience and progress obtained by the Indian States in the sphere of education will lose contact with the machinery devised for British India. Educational progress in India is hampered by periodic financial inhibitions, and the first task of the Board must be to secure a statutory grant for giving effect to its recommendations.

Among the various factors which have rendered the academic problem increasingly complex in India, mention must be made of the immense expansion of scientific knowledge with its reactions on the social and economic life of the country, the vastly increased demand for higher and technological education, the wider conception of the duties of the modern universities and the emergence in the body politic of social communities which had previously remained indifferent. We are not impressed by the zeal of educationists for the constitutional reform of their institutions, however important they may be to the inner life of their administration, for the outside world always measures the efficiency of the machinery by its results, unmoved by its structural beauty. The problem of the public is comparatively simple. The man in the street

desires to enter his sons for his own professions or aspires to give them access to the public service of the country. To a matter-of-fact person, the ideal of knowledge for its own sake has few attractions, and his greatest concern is that the money he invests in the education of his children should bring return in the form of enrichment of his own profession, or that their service to the State should be adequately remunerated. Such a man has very little use for the type of education now imparted in our schools and colleges, which in his judgment leads nowhere. One of the criticisms passed on modern education is that the cultural and social advantages of higher education are beyond the reach of the man of humble means. Of all the questions which will engage the earnest and immediate attention of the projected Board, the most important ones appear to us to be the statutory grant, the education of the poor man's children and the problem of the pass-man.

The Government of India contemplate the creation of a number of Committees to assist the Advisory Board in the investigation of relevant problems, and perhaps the most vital question that will confront the Board, when brought into being, must relate to Finance. There should be established a Committee of Finance of moderate dimensions, of independent character and possessed of adequate powers to act as a link between Government and the Board. We would prefer to call this body, Committee of Reference. It should enjoy statutory power for the purpose of elucidating and correlating expenditure on the several grades of education, besides exercising advisory and supervisory authority in connection with the financial allocation in each province. The advice of this Committee in regard to the assignment of contributions by the Central and Provincial Governments to educational and university purposes should be adopted, which would thus secure unification of the financial policies of the different administrative authorities. If such a body is to be efficient it must include independent men of affairs, who could pronounce impartially upon conflicting claims, and also persons who are cognizant of the needs and general practice of the universities and have a genuine interest in their welfare and progress. We emphasise the importance of the Committee of Reference because it is borne in upon us that the clue to the majority of the

educational and university problems and the condition of their reforms must ultimately be finance, and unless the Committee secures adequate statutory financial contribution, progress will be impossible.

It is obvious that since the appearance in the political field, many of the social classes in India are anxious to participate in the benefits of higher education, to which they are attracted as an instrument in the task of preparation for their new and arduous responsibilities. They regard higher education as an indispensable equipment for the part that they desire to play in national life. The extension of the franchise, the increasing association with local self-governing bodies and the organisation of social groups have given them power which they rightly think they can exercise for the advantage of their own class and also for that of the nation, if this power is accompanied by knowledge. Our schools and colleges are now filled with the sons of these social classes, because they think that they have a right to share in the national cultural inheritance, and it is appropriate that special facilities and preferential treatment should be offered to them. But in recent times, the discussion of the question of creating special advantages for them has suffered from the defect that little or no attempt has been made to distinguish between the various classes among whom the term "poor" is treated as synonymous with that of "backward". We attribute the failure of some modern educational expedients aiming at reform, to this confusion of ideas, and the fact is that plans suitable to one section have been found almost inapplicable to the other. The changes in the economic life of modern society and in the intellectual progress of the nation necessitates a more scientific distinction of the communities; for the wage-earning classes who could properly have been called "poor" half a century ago have now acquired wealth, while those who may fairly be termed "backward" did not at that time aspire to higher education. But in so far as both of them represent particular strata in the national life, it is obvious that they should have free access to the advantages of higher education.

Perhaps the most delicate and difficult task for the Advisory Board will be to formulate their proposals for the working-class education, to encourage the desire of the industrial communities to profit by

academic discipline. If this desire is genuine, then it seems to us that its satisfaction should not exclusively be left to private enterprise or to a somewhat precarious combination between state and municipal interests, but that it should be recognised and regulated by the Board or by one of its Committees. Should there be a working-men's school and college in every important industrial centre, where education is imparted free of cost? In answering this question, it should be borne in mind that gratuitous benefactions do not promote a sense of self-respect, nor is their value fully appreciated. For the creation of such institutions for the children of humble means, the Board must seek and find assistance from public-spirited benefactors to supplement its other resources. Education is a slow process and naturally therefore it does not excite popular imagination or stir public sympathy. The recent enhancement of school and college fees and dues, owing largely to the shrinkage of grants to these institutions has placed impediments in the way of poor young men who wish to take their share in the academic and social advantages of higher education. If in spite of subsidies in pecuniary or other shapes which the poor disappointed young men might otherwise obtain, there are features in the higher general and professional institutions, which act as a deterrent to the entry of such students. We do not subscribe to the theory that education is meant only for those who have sufficient means and intelligence to profit by it. If a man is sufficiently rich he is often indifferent to education. The purpose of education is to seek those whose intellectual powers are dormant and to stimulate them for the advantage not only of their own class but also for that of the nation. The problem of educating the poor is a national task to which the proposed Advisory Board must give serious attention.

In the way of broadening the avenues for the admission of wider classes to the benefits of higher education, we are met with two problems, *viz.*, examinations and pass-men. If it could be proved that examinations by the qualities that they test, are a valuable adjunct to a young man's education, we might face all the unsparing criticisms which the public heap upon them. Examinations are jumbled together with an uncertain multiplicity of standards with neither consistency nor uniformity. A man who is rejected in one college or university

may obtain admission to another where he may pass with honours. This is a question which no scheme of reform undertaken by the Central Advisory Board can overlook, and which cannot be permanently ignored.

The question of examination in the last resort raises the issue of the pass-man and of his position in the field of higher education. We have no concern here with the pass-man whose idleness is responsible for his poor academical achievements but we have every consideration for the other type of pass-man whose honest endeavours have resulted only in very modest performance. It should be remembered before judgment is pronounced on such a student, that he is entirely ignorant of his own mental capabilities. He has inherited these and education cannot replace them, but can only polish them. It is ignorance of this fundamental fact that must account for all the denunciation of these young men and for opinions frankly expressed that the standard of higher education should be sufficiently stiffened to exclude them from its advantages. The Universities have obviously no use for such young men, and the employer passively accepts the verdict of the academic bodies in considering his employability. It seems to us that this judgment is as harsh and hasty, as his rejection is unsound and unwarranted. If the Universities expend their energies and resources on the creation of an intellectual oligarchy, then they cease to be national institutions, and may have to forfeit their claims to be supported by national revenues.

A great injustice is perpetrated when the idle pass-man is taken to be the type of the pass-man in general, and when the sins of the individual are visited upon the class. We shall cheerfully accept the reproach of being Philistine or reactionary, if we can succeed in impressing upon the public mind that the first concern of higher education is to instruct and enlighten the pass-man. If our universities are to continue to deserve public support, they have few more important duties to perform than to give a good general education to the man of poor capabilities. To convert him into an enlightened and useful public servant is as honourable a task of our educational institutions as it is to discover and foster eminent talents, and it is a fact that many of the men, who in later life have reflected the greatest credit on their education, have been those who never took more than a pass degree. We do not believe