

Testament of Age

Education isn't what it used to be. Education is the same as it was two thousand years ago. Is there a conflict between these two statements?

No-one today is satisfied with our nation's education. We have increasing vandalism, and decreasing standards of responsibility. A lower standard of living than the nations we defeated forty years ago. An industry in which we lead the world twenty years ago - motor cycle manufacture - is totally surrendered to other countries. Our political influence in the last fifty years has so declined that from being the world leaders fifty years ago - we could move anywhere in the world with respect and authority - we have the rest of the world criticising our resistance to a South American country invading British territory. We have recognised faults in our country's working efficiency which we know how to solve but can't agree to act. We have simple solutions to Trade Union problems but no response.

Above all there is a problem in our democratic procedure. Our population as individuals do not understand democracy. We know our rights and freedoms but not the responsibilities. Education has made a freer society but not told the nation its price to pay for that freedom. There is apathy.

After the war Britain had had enough. The war would never have taken place if Britain (England) had been in any state of defence before the start. Hitler took full advantage of England's lack of preparation. This was due to apathy. Vansittart and Churchill preached the message. Politicians were more concerned with power. Baldwin ignored the threat of war and as a politician cultivated appeasement which Chamberlain developed. When the soldiers returned after enduring four years of hell they wanted a quiet life - the ideal was to get away from it all on a Pacific Island. Bother you, Jack, I'm alright!

This affects democracy. Another political mistake is the consistent general appeal of a politician to lower taxes. Before the wars a local councillor called Pillar preached no rise in rates for Plymouth. This forced the opposition, due to its success, to adopt the policy. Therefore there was no progress for Plymouth. In effect although there were two opposing parties - they still had the same policy - and this is not true democracy. The result of apathy is decline.

True democracy exists when an argument is put with equal force with its opposition to reach a mutual and supported agreement on action to the advantage of the group. This essential grass root principle has not been supported by politicians or chiefs of education. It certainly is not set by example in local or national government. This is a key deficiency. What is the answer?

First politicians and any leader must recognise that democracy and responsibility and co-operation must begin with them. There is a wealth of responsibility in the teaching profession despite the undermining of a decade's illusion on the part of major politicians. The Department of Education has failed in its representation of the profession to the national politicians. Chiefs of Education in local government have failed in their efforts to point out to politicians what is wrong. Much of their thinking is based on false evidence. Reports - which are costly - may appear to be correct but are catastrophic in the application of their findings. How many authorities are still not admitting children in the September before their fifth birthday? This is due to bosses not with it. What a mess the present system brings, and how much backwardness in pupils is caused. The cost is minimal. What is the use of teachers working hard when the system is uphill? It is heartbreaking.

Class sizes could be smaller. Any class of twenty is sufficient for general individual attention of a teacher. What do we do about that? It is not the teacher's fault - it is the politician who runs education. This is the major cause of decline. Those educationalists who are at the top do not realise their importance in what is valuable at the coal face. They do not know the infantry man's problems.

The other major cause of decline is in use of the community to educate children in responsibility. This is a continuous deficiency. The school should be given the staffing to organise the youth and adults to continue the educational process in the evenings and at weekends.

Education has not changed - the principle of learning from experience and that we are all learning from these experiences continuously is still the same as the Greeks knew it.

Just as forty, fifty and a hundred years ago popular education has failed in Britain - so it is failing now. The intensity of study needs developing. There is a need for small classes and a continuity into evenings and weekends. This is the message of two thousands of years, or more. The Greeks had small classes - and modern education never has.

Fashions of playway, palatial palaces of schools, false economies of cuts, Nuffield French, the need for new books, etc., look and say, sentence method, and other innovations are not important or valuable. What is important is to give the pupils what the nation needs. Responsibility and higher standards are what are

needed - now. The answer is smaller classes and more work.

Teachers are aware of this. They are not satisfied with their leadership, which swiftly changes direction in sheer ignorance, and is making mistakes galore with peoples' lives. There is an urgent need for more teachers and helpers to get on with the real job - and beat the Japs.

Then we would not have a mediocre education - we deserve better anyway.