

"The important developments in the educational process come from within the child himself ... affecting the whole personality" (Comenius), but "No man is an island" (Donne). "The world's mine oyster" (Shakespeare) and "Education is atmosphere" (Sir R. Livingstone). For Rousseau, "The crucial age in human life is that between birth and the age of twelve", and "Education is social philosophy in action" (G. Vickers).

These are just a few of the ideas that philosophers and thinkers, poets and educators, have expressed on the subject of education and which have affected my attitude and thinking. During the brief thirteen months' Emergency Training Course I was fortunate enough to take part in after ten years in offices and factories before and during the war of 1939-45, there was time of discuss and develop such ideas.

That experiment in teacher-training, staffed to a large extent by the more adventurous of college lecturers brought into the profession men and women who had not been able to go on from school into higher education as well as others who had missed out because of the war. It ought to have been the opportunity for a radical re-appraisal of the education system. There were brave experiments, of course, and it was in the nursery-infant field that most enlightened practices were introduced. But practical difficulties hampered teachers, keen to give their pupils more opportunity to develop creatively, to explore the possibilities, of science, art, creative skills and - in order to do all these things - to move about more freely in the school environment. How could this be achieved in small, poorly equipped rooms occupied by, more often than not, fifty children? It has been a long haul and campaign by the teachers' unions, educators and those enlightened representatives on Education Committees and in Parliament who cared, to reduce these numbers to a target of even 30 per class. Now we see the ratio rising as grants are cut, economy rules and trained teachers are unemployed.

In the secondary sector the 1944 Act created the appalling situation of five different types of school - prolonging privilege and maintaining the iniquitous 11+ test. This still exists in many areas because schools there are comprehensive in name only. The five types of schooling recommended in the Act were: Grammar, Technical, Modern, Residential (of varying kinds) and Public Schools at which a percentage of free places should be allowed.

Looking at the situation confronting the school leaver we find this inequality continued in the present system of enterprise schemes - one to encourage one-man businesses and the other offering technical and vocational training to 14-18 year olds. Lord Young, Minister Without Portfolio, recently interviewed in the Guardian, was challenged to justify his enterprise schemes and to comment on Mr Wedgwood Benn's remark that all young people should be "educated" and it was wrong to offer only training to some. There were people who said this was Tories being elitist. He replied that if the Tories were elitist they wouldn't have launched the vocational and technical training schemes. "Tell me," said Lord Young, "do you get educated as a surgeon, or trained? All training means is that you're educated in skills which you apply. It's no good giving people academic education and calling it education, if they're not interested. As soon as you've made a young person realise that they're bright at something, it spills over into all their other activities and they become bright at everything else." Discussing unemployment he added, "There's an enormous opportunity for growth in the service sector." He pointed out that as a nation we still eat out less than in France, than anywhere in Europe or the United States. "There's an enormous shortage of personal services." A nation, not of sheep, but cooks and waiters, I wonder?

In 1931 the Hadow Report denounced as artificial the conventional division of Junior School work into subjects and lessons and advised a curriculum "thought of in terms of activity and experience rather than of knowledge to be acquired and facts to be stored".

In 1944, discussing the proposed Education Act, and five-tier secondary education, Kenneth Richmond (Education in England, Pelican, 1945) saw the unfairness and difficulty of selection at 11+.

In 1985 much that was opposed in these two Acts is still with us.

What Act, what action, could achieve a more ideal system? While we are bound so closely to the examination routine and a competitive environment with too few opportunities for all young people I cannot see a way out. I feel there has to be a place for imparting knowledge and the basic skills. To be able to read is vital. Books open up a world that is exciting, stimulating, challenging. I do not believe in anarchy. We have to live in the society in which we find ourselves and conform to those rules which preserve that society as a caring and compassionate one. This is not to say that we should accept all that makes it unfair to many, selfish and with priorities that deny part of the population the chances and opportunities of the privileged few.

Education should make young people critical, questioning and prepared to rebel against injustice. Can this be achieved without violence and intolerance? The aim of much eighteenth and nineteenth century

education was to give the working classes just enough of learning but to "keep them in their place". Enlightened law-makers in the educational field have altered that. But there are still "haves" and "have-nots". Individual schools and teachers are working to remedy this but they are hampered and discouraged by lack of resources and pressures from administrators and, often, from parents.

Education is not just the business of schools, colleges and universities. We learn from the home environment, friends, the books we read, the experiences of day to day living. These are the stimuli that enable us to develop our maximum potential. Those who are in contact with young people have a tremendous responsibility. If they are to be assessed for fitness for this position (Sir Keith Joseph et al.) then the standards by which they are judged need to be decided upon with great deliberation by a wide spectrum of people of high integrity. Who would these be? Philosophers, judges, professors and teachers who have achieved respect in their careers? And what of the pupils themselves? Can we draw up a "blue print" for the ideal educator? I doubt it.