

তারিখ 17 APR 1987

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Text-book Review

It is several weeks since the National Curriculum and Textbook Board, responding to widespread criticisms of their textbooks, announced their decision to have them reviewed. So far so good. But the personnel of any of the Review Committees has not been made public yet. This, we are afraid, is hardly likely to increase the educated public's confidence in the Board's intentions.

Let us not forget that the decision to appoint Review Committees has been arrived at very reluctantly, the Board having maintained throughout the current controversy that in the production of Text-books they rely on the labours of the best available "Talent". Their assessment of what good talent means has been seriously shaken by their choice of obscure writers to create good readable English and Bengali prose. Nor do the books on History, Geography and Mathematics point to more careful standards. Daily, one paper after another, comes up with the discovery of factual and linguistic errors which, as one of our correspondents said, the Board would conveniently palm off on the printers' devil.

Secondly, the public has a right to know the exact terms of reference under which the Review Committees are expected to function. Their work will be seriously hampered if they are called upon to 'revise' the existing books rather than be free to recommend new ones. What is in question is the soundness of the Board's policy of having even English prose manufactured locally. This, we maintain, is a serious misinterpretation of giving education a national bias. This means one thing for such subjects as History or Social Studies, and another for English or Mathematics or the Sciences when absolute accuracy must be the first priority.

We have pointed out before that if English has to be retained—and no one doubts this—it needs to be taught well and effectively and pupils must be given a taste of the language as it is spoken by those whose mother tongue it is. They must know what authentic English prose is. There exist numerous series especially written for all levels by English speaking experts. To reject them and impose on children a local brand of English which, to judge by the specimens in the Board's books, represents BANG-LISH at its worst, is to commit a crime against youth.