



The Text-book Scandal

There has been no public reaction so far either from the Ministry of Education or the Education Directorate to the criticisms which are being voiced of the Curriculum Board's performance in the matter of text-books approved and circulated by it. The charge that many of its products are not only seriously flawed but a discredit to the country's educational policy has been repeated over and over again during the last six months or so, and those who ventured to criticise these books have offered proof to substantiate it. Yet, unfortunately, there has been no response from anyone in authority, as though the complaint against the Curriculum Board was to be lightly dismissed as a frivolity.

The main focus of these criticisms has been the text-book entitled English For Today Book Eight meant for higher secondary classes. Those who have written have said time and time again that neither its contents nor its language is fit for prescription. What at best can be called journalistic exercises which no newspaper worth its name would care to print, written by obscure men whose deficiency in English should be a reproach to the profession they pursue, are being forcibly thrust down the throats of teenagers who have reached an age when they should be exposed to standard writing in English.

If English has to be taught it needs to be taught well and effectively. We shall not go into the reasons why it deserves to be retained on our syllabuses, but it must be emphasised that neglect of English as long as it continues to be taught is no sign of patriotism. Let us by all means promote Bengali at all levels, but this must not be interpreted as an excuse for low educational standards.

We have said before and we repeat, that educational standards are determined by the kind of text-books we adopt and the quality of teachers we employ. No educational reform, whatever the motive and inspiration behind it, will yield the results expected if the quality of text-books and teachers is allowed to decline.

We are being told that a far-reaching reform of the entire system of education is in the offing. But if such reform meant only changing examination schedules or the marking system or the inclusion of one or two attractive subjects, nothing much will be gained. Most of our reforms in the past have been of this kind, and what they achieved is there for all to see. Our standards have so deteriorated that a university graduate today seems much less equipped to meet the challenges of life than school leavers fifty years ago.

The authorities may well plead that the actual responsibility of taking care of standards has been distributed among a number of organisations including the Curriculum Board. That may well be correct, but then Boards need to have their work and performance reviewed critically from time to time. If the Curriculum Board leaps to the defence of a publication, merely because it sponsored it, it would be demonstrating a narrowness of outlook unworthy of an academic body. We do hope it will have the sense not to identify itself with those so-called experts who have let it down by palming off on it a book like English For Today Book Eight. In the interests of its own reputation and integrity, the Board should, in our judgement, throw this book out immediately and reestablish its credential as an academic institution concerned with the maintenance of the highest possible educational standards rather than with the sale of a book universally rejected. The stakes are high. A whole generation of young men and women are being fed on a book which no person with any knowledge of English could defend, and which will hamper their intellectual development for good.