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School Textbooks For 1991

The report that the Textbook Board has not yet found it possible to announce its recommendations for books to be printed for use in January 1991 is cause for academic alarm.

The manuscripts which it has been considering were submitted in April, and there are only two months left in which to complete the entire process of printing, binding, and marketing the new textbooks. We are again about to be caught in yet another cycle of procrastination, misjudgment, and error due to haste on the part of publishers, and the victims will be our children who must have their textbooks in their hands at the start of the new school year beginning in January. That has been the country's experience since the fifties, and in spite of protests and widespread criticism those responsible for the approval of textbooks appear to learn no lesson. They keep repeating the same delay year after year, and seem to think that publication is a business like any other (but certainly not all) that can be tackled hurriedly to meet a deadline.

It is little use blaming publishers for putting on the market books bristling with errors, when they are allowed only a couple of months in which to get them ready. This year, unless an announcement is made in the next few days, that is, before the end of October, the time available to them may be less than two months.

We said the other day in our leaders on the crisis in education that the standard of education depends as much on good teaching as on good textbooks. Good books, of any kind for that matter, call for careful planning, research, revision, correction and scrupulous printing. All this is a time-consuming process, a fact which our educational authorities either do not know or proceed to ignore. The disregard for elementary rules that the Textbook Board betrays in this matter is hard to believe.

It is almost unnecessary to say nowadays that the situation is made worse by corruption at different levels of educational administrations. Publishers often complain that the only way of getting a manuscript approved is to grease certain palms; it does not matter how good it is, how carefully a writer may have compiled it. They, we mean the publishers, are forced to set apart a certain amount for gratuities as one might call them euphemistically as part of their investment, and those who can offer the highest bids win, regardless of how wretched their manuscripts are. At the end of this line stand innocent children whose future is at stake in the matter.