

## Elective Principle In Education

The purity of the intentions behind a piece of social, political or economic legislation is no guarantee that it will produce the effects and results intended and unless such measures are periodically reviewed in the light of experience, a heavy price has to be paid for the miscalculation committed. That is exactly what appears to have happened in the matter of the elective principle that is continually insisted upon in the management of educational institutions in this country. The elective principle or democracy is no doubt a laudable thing; it enlarges the choices before a society. But there are areas in life where it may not always work and may defeat its purpose.

When we insist on chairman of academic departments or deans or vice-chairman being elected rather than chosen on the basis of seniority and experience, we ignore the vital truth that in matters of academic the opinion of the majority is really of little importance. If a majority decided, for instance that two plus two made five instead of four that would not amount to intellectual advancement. A comparatively junior person asked to frame or guide an academic programme may, because of his inexperience, make mistakes which will prove costly.

But this is by no means the only objection to academic democracy. Love of power being innate in man and having regard to the powers and privileges attached to the offices of Chairmen and deans a perpetual scramble for office inevitably follows whenever the elective principle is introduced, to the detriment, as we have seen, of study and research which ought to be the main object in academic institutions.

We have no intention of casting aspersions on anybody or any particular institution. But reports of ceaseless election campaigns of one kind or another are so common and frequent now-a-days that the outsider can justifiably wonder whether teachers and students have time for anything else. For the election of chairmen and deans is not the only thing which engages their energies. There are senior official associations and unions at every level and consequently a struggle for power which goes on round the seasons in one form or another. A review of our experience in the last fifteen years seems urgently called for.

What would alarm anybody interested in education as such is the risk already evident here and there, of what looks like a process of politicisation being carried further into the content of the courses taught or the assessment of merit. That these apprehensions are not ill-founded will be admitted by those who have carefully watched the spread of academic unrest in recent years. The willingness to accept official academic verdicts has been so eroded that it is not unusual to hear students questioning, among others, the integrity of their examiners. Unfortunately staff and students are so sharply divided that it is difficult to convince some of them that a person may profess a particular political opinion and yet perform his academic duties honestly.

This, we must say, is a dangerous omen which is likely, if left unchecked, to sap the foundations of the very concept of education itself. We hope the academic community as a whole realises the danger and will put their heads together to discover a remedy. The risks created by the abuse of democracy, can, paradoxically, be met only by democratic action. No imposed solution can be effective in such a situation.

The situation confronting educationists today represents a long and slow evolution, a process involving a gradual blurring of distinctions between what is permissible in education and what is not.

Less attention has been paid to the object of education, and more and more to the issue of democratic rights as in politics. The end-result is something in which primary objects have been obscured by what is essentially secondary.

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