

December 5, 1953

From the South

Modified Education Scheme

THE Madras Government's revised scheme of Elementary Education, which, following a spate of Opposition criticism, was referred to an expert committee under the chairmanship of Prof R V Parulekar, has received its general approval. The Committee, which heard the evidence of educationists and others, has however suggested certain improvements in details of the scheme the principal features of which are:

(a) reduction in the number of study hours in elementary schools in the panchayat villages of the State, where it has already been introduced, from five to three per session;

(b) introduction of two three-hour shifts in schools, one in the morning and the other in the afternoon; and

(c) enabling children to learn a craft or trade at home or in a workshop in the village during leisure hours.

Objections against the scheme were partly on academic and partly, if not mainly, on political grounds. It was argued, for instance, that the introduction of two shifts a day would impose a heavy burden on the already overworked and ill-paid elementary school teachers and impair their efficiency; that the proposal for helping pupils learn a craft out of school hours would prove infructuous in practice for lack of teacher guidance¹ and because of the incapacity of village craftsmen to impart useful instruction; and that if children were made to learn the traditional occupation of the family like agriculture, carpentry, pottery, and weaving; etc. it would tend to stereotype existing caste and communal differences in the countryside and thus obstruct progress.

The Parulekar Committee did not consider that these objections were quite valid or legitimate. On the contrary it concluded that the Scheme was on the whole "a move in the right directions" and that it was a "pioneering effort", which other States would have to adopt if they were to implement the directive in the Constitution that all children up to the age of 14 should be given education.

A shift of three hours, and two shifts in a day are best calculated to promote universal literacy within a few years by doubling the number

of pupils attending schools in the present conditions. The Committee, in this connection, set targets for enrolment, so that an additional five lakhs, eight lakhs and twelve lakhs of pupils would be admitted by the end of June 1954, 1955 and 1956 respectively. To attain these targets, it recommended a co-ordinated effort both by official and non-official agencies.

When financial considerations come in the way of a rapid multiplication of schools and increase in the number of teachers, the only way to provide instruction to the 58.8 per cent of non-school-going children in Madras State in the age group of 6 to 12 is to arrange the hours of work in such a manner that the maximum number of children may attend school and get the best possible results. It does not mean that schools are not to increase in number in the meantime. They must and will, but meanwhile it is good to utilize the existing resources to the maximum extent.

The programme of out of school work, which is an integral part of the Scheme, is in complete with progressive educational opinion in the world today. The Committee agrees that this part of the Scheme will give the children an opportunity "for the exercise of initiative and for participation in the life and work of the community" and shift the emphasis in child education from book-centred to activity-centred processes. It is, in essence, an adaptation of the Basic Education concept, and an acceptable substitute for it, which, the Committee agrees, is more costly than the existing system.

There is, of course, the important and connected problem of facilities for fruitful out of school activities in some of the villages. At the moment, the sense of citizenship among our people has not developed to the extent that the community can be depended upon to take charge of these activities and make them yield the expected benefits. While, having no illusions on this point, the Committee expresses the hope that such a community sense will develop in course of time. It is of vital importance that the isolation of the village school from the life of the village community must end. This will be possible only when interest of the community is roused

in the education of the village children. The additional burden of work that the modified Scheme will impose on teachers is also admitted by the Committee, but it expects that in course of time they will get accustomed to it. Meanwhile, it has been suggested that appropriate increments in salary should be given to teachers "to rouse their enthusiasm for their work" and to maintain it.

The Committee suggests that the modified Scheme presently put in operation in the panchayat villages should be extended to municipal areas also. Associated with this is the recommendation that the 15-year old elementary education curriculum in the State should be modified to bring it in line with the developing needs of Indian life under a free Constitution.

The main problem, as will be seen from what has been said above, is the proper organisation of out of school activity, and in this the active interest and co-operation of the local craftsmen has to be enlisted. To secure this end, the Parulekar Committee suggests, firstly, payment of remuneration to the co-operating craftsmen, secondly, scientific training for craftsmen to enable them to impart instruction in their workshops, and thirdly, the appointment of a full-time or part-time worker on an honorary or paid basis for a single village or a group of villages for the execution of the programme.

The importance of public co-operation in the implementation of the Scheme has been stressed by the Committee. This is particularly significant in view of the belligerent opposition that some sections of the people put up against the Scheme immediately after its introduction. Now that expert opinion has approved not only the bases, but also the details of the Scheme in many respects, it may be expected that opposition elements will revise their view.

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