

F O C U S

ESSAY ON EDUCATION

By Errol Sharpe

Many of us who have been out of High School for a number of years and have graduated from University or are progressing, if that is the right word, toward graduation fail to realize that the whole process of mis-education starts in the elementary school system and is continually perpetuated through the public school system. By the time that students reach University they have been almost totally immersed in a system which has successfully conditioned them to a program of memorization. They have been conditioned to examination technique and have rather successfully mastered the art of "passing exams." Students in High School are told by administrations and teachers to try and anticipate what is going to appear on the examination, told to note the things that the "teacher says are important", told to memorize dates, capital cities, formulas and vocabularies and generally accept their robot-like lot in life. In true fact students, like computers and robots, are programmed and like computers and robots are completely incapable of creative thought.

This whole program fits very nicely into our industrialized society where it is very disturbing and even dangerous to let people who are "free thinkers" wonder around loose. Society demands people who have been properly programmed so that they will "fit" into the system. The educational system's job is to mould each individual until he "fits". This, in the assembly line fashion through which it takes place, provides the right person for the right slot at the right time. The system refuses to accept or recognize that each person is an individual. It is only the amazing adaptability of man which allows him to be desecrated to the extent that he is.

This operation is inexplicably wrong and fantastically limiting. We have stifled and drowned human creativity and forced students to fit into a massive, monolithic, industrial complex which is in itself so rigid that it cannot adapt to change. When this has happened in the past it has led to the total destruction of that system. Because of the systems rigidity and the inborn adventurous spirit of man any system which is inflexible must sooner or later face the wrath of the human spirit. When it does the shaking of the foundations is so severe that the whole structure will crumble.

We in this society have developed a system that funnels man's creative energy. His creativity is gathered and coralled and poured into a funnel which in turn directs it into a vessel which shapes it to its own form. However, controlling the energy of man is like trying to put the cap on an exploding bomb. Inevitably the container will burst and man will prevail.

The present system is limiting because it pigeon-holes the creativity of man. People are forced to fit into the system, to find his slot, and then to fit into it.

However disconcerting this might be there are alternatives to the present system. The object of any society should be to develop a system which is flexible enough to accommodate the creative abilities of each individual in that society. Such a society would be unlimited in its scope, or at least limited only by the numbers and variety of people in it. The object of society should be to develop patterns which would be to encourage and provide means of expression for the creative endeavours of its citizens. Such a society would make use of its multiple human resources or rather be used as a resource for the individual people in the society.

This type of social structure would have to be as creative and flexible as the people in it. It would have to be open and ready to accept change and adapt to the multiplicity of human expressions and needs. It would demand a great sense of interresponsibility on behalf of its citizens. However such a society would be continually expanding, exciting creative, intellectually and artistically stimulating society.

In order for us to approach the type of society that is suggested here massive changes must take place in our educational system. Just as the present education system conditions people for a highly structured monolithic system the new system must condition people to be self-expressive, creative, and intellectually free. I use the word condition because people must be shocked out of their present lethargy. This cannot be

done in the present system of mass education. If each individual is to find himself, be encouraged and stimulated to develop his own creative energies, he must be seen as an individual and treated as such; not as a number or a name.

This implies a number of things in regard to educational patterns.

First students must be encouraged to develop their own thought patterns and be provided with the tools that they need to do this. The "teacher" should act as a guide or counsellor rather than a fountain of knowledge who imparts his learning to a mass of students through a process which stimulates the pouring of gasoline into an automobile or feeding pabulum to a baby. The "teacher" should direct the student toward sources where the student himself may obtain knowledge and find expression for his creative energies, not "tell", the student and then expect him to "memorize" the answer. When the student finds things out for himself his learning is a personal learning experience related to his total life and not a bunch of unrelated facts to be regurgitated on an examination paper.

Secondly each student's progress must be evaluated individually. He must be judged on how he has progressed in his personal learning experience. The evaluation process must be such that the student will learn about himself and his development in performing the exercise itself. Present examination practices are an indication of how well a student has memorized the "right things" but no indication of how long he will retain even these facts. In close evaluation it would be proven that very little is retained. This situation occurs because the type of learning has not become a part of the personal learning experience of the individual. The purpose was to pass an examination so the facts are retained only long enough to pass the exam and then forgotten. However if the learning process is a part of the learning experience of the individual then it will become a part of him and nothing can erase it. The examination of progress should be determined on the basis of learning experience so that then the examination itself is part of the person's own experience.

At present the social system demands what education is to be and what the graduates of the system are. The society says we need so many doctors, so many lawyers, so many engineers, etc., and the education system provides them. It is time that the education system said to society "Here are our graduates, they have reached a level of personal development and intellectual capability which satisfies the requirements of this institution. We demand that society provide a life form which will allow their personal development and intellectual capability to grow and expand. We demand also that society provide us with the material things with which we can provide free people who will in turn produce a free society."

When we in the educational system accept the challenge to work for the radical changes that this statement implies then, and only then, will we be fulfilling the role of educators. Until then we, like the IBM trainers will be programmers.

This process must begin at the elementary school level and progress through the education system. To start in the middle or at the top is an exercise in frustration because the conditioning program has been frighteningly efficient. A student who graduates from the present High School takes four years to develop his own independent thought; four years that need not be wasted on doing something that should and could have been done in the first year of school.

Finally, I'm not sure that any of us have all the answers because we too are a part of the conditioning process — but we can learn. In order for us in the education field to learn the best ways to give students a chance for free education we must have the freedom ourselves to conduct various new and imaginative experiments. The present system does not allow us this freedom. It seems that our first task is to convince the "powers that be" to provide for the types of experimentation which will help develop the new processes of education that need to be developed.

Editor's Note: Mr. Sharpe graduated from Saint Dunstan's in 1967. He is presently teaching at the Charlottetown Regional High School.

IT'S YOUR WORLD

"THE QUIET REVOLUTION"

BY MORDO

The French have been in Canada for over three hundred years. During this long period they have seen both good and bad times. In 1763 Canada passed under the control of Great Britain. At that time there were approximately 300,000 French in Canada. Since the advent of English rule they have been faced with a threat to their survival — the threat of gradual assimilation and anglicization.

True — under the Treaty of 1762 they had been assured freedom of language and religions and all other benefits of British law, but the continuing dominance of the English still seemed to threaten that which the law protected. French-Canadian society, by nature predominantly rural-centered, allowed the English to attain a dominance in the social, political, and economic fields which continues to this day. This is why the French-Canadians, now grown to a population of six million, still consider their existence threatened.

This threat, real or unreal, has led directly to what has been dubbed "THE QUIET REVOLUTION" in Quebec. It began with the death of Premier Maurice Duplessis in 1959. Had it not been for this petty dictator it probably would have begun years earlier. He stifled all desire for change — for the aims of the Quiet Revolution did not coincide with his idea of what Quebec should be. The revolution gained momentum during the administration of Jean Lesage and further increased when the Union Nationale government took office in 1966.

Just what is meant by the Quiet Revolution? What does Quebec want? These questions have been asked many times. In my view, Quebec and French-Canadians want nothing less than **definite guarantees for the survival of the French language and culture.** There are different views among French-Canadians as to how this can best be achieved. Some feel that "Special Status" for Quebec is the answer. This would involve the transfer of some powers from the Federal to the Provincial Government. It would probably entail more "opting out" by Quebec with subsequent transferrals of money to that province.

For a number of reasons this is unacceptable as a solution. In the first place it would lead to a weakened Canada. How? Well, power goes where the money goes. "Opting out" simply means that Quebec refuses to take part in joint Federal-Provincial programs. However they would still get the same amount of money from the Federal Government as they would if they were in the program. The difference is they can use the money for whatever they want. What this amounts to is the use of federal money for purposes not voted on by the Parliament in Canada. Taken to the extreme Quebec could opt out of all programs, still get federal money, and decide alone on how it is to be spent. The situation in Ottawa would be something like this. Quebec would have 74 M.P.'s deciding where money is to be spent in the rest of Canada while, because of Quebec's opting out, the English M.P.'s would have no say on how federal money was spent in Quebec. The net result is separatism in everything but name.

Another proposed solution is entailed in the "SOVEREIGNTY" movement led by Rene Levesque. Mr. Levesque envisages a separate Quebec in some kind of economic union with the rest of Canada. He feels that if Quebec is politically independent then it would be easier to work our terms for an economic union that would benefit both Canada and Quebec. However, if we can't work together when we are part of the same country, it's hard to see how it would be any easier as two separate nations.

The third proposal is out and out separatism — a complete break politically and economically from the rest of Canada. Many people claim this wouldn't work as it would drastically reduce Quebec's standard of living. Indeed, they claim, it would ruin the whole Quebec economy. But let's not fool ourselves; if they really wanted to, the French could survive in such a situation. They would have to tighten their belts but they, as well as any other cultural or linguistic group, would consider this a small price if it ensured their survival as a people.

However separatism is not the answer either. It would raise more problems than it would solve. Besides the economic problems it entails, it would immediately result in a restriction of the horizons of all French-Canadians. Instead of a country of almost 4,000,000 square miles they would limit themselves to one of only 600,000. If their role could be safeguarded it seems to me more preferable to play a part in the larger unit.

Separatism would greatly increase the danger to the French language and culture. English Canada could not survive as a separate political entity without Quebec. It would eventually be absorbed by the U.S. The situation then facing Quebec would be one of six million French in an area of 600,000 sq. miles completely isolated and surrounded by a country of two hundred and thirty million English in an area of over 6,000,000 sq. miles. Could Quebec survive indefinitely in the face of this fact? I don't think so.

The only real solution is still Federalism. One Canada, a strong Canada, which can work together to ward off the tremendous influence of our friends south of the border. The French-Canadian must be shown and convinced that their aims, desires, and goals can be best achieved in a strong and united Canada — a Canada that will increasingly become aware of the French fact and its desire to survive. If they cannot achieve all their goals as conditions now stand then these conditions will have to change.