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NATIONAL EDUCATION COUNCIL

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THE NATIONAL EDUCATION COUNCIL

(By the CHAIRMAN, PROFESSOR H.B. THOM)

As Chairman of the National Education Council I have on various occasions been faced with rather embarrassing questions. One inquiring individual asked bluntly: Have you people got a clear-cut blueprint for the future of education in this country? The answer was obviously: No!

On the occasion of a symposium on educational matters an educationist enquired: Have you and the members of your Council reached complete clarity about the objects and aims of education in general and your Council in particular? *also in this case the* The answer was obviously: No!

On another occasion the question was put to me: Have you got the necessary machinery to revolutionise education in the Republic? *On another occasion the question was put to me: Have you got the necessary machinery to revolutionise education in the Republic? Again the answer was obviously: No! - and I added:*

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We have neither the machinery, nor the intention, to revolutionise education in this country.

For fear of being accused of an uninspiring, negative attitude, I would like to elaborate briefly on these points. We haven't got a clear-cut blueprint for the future, but we are putting in a lot of hard and honest work in order to find a blueprint. The predecessor of the ~~National~~ Education Council, viz. the old National Advisory Education Council, already rendered meritorious service in this regard, and this work has been followed up by the present Council. Largely as a result of the work done by these bodies, a commendable degree of uniformity has been attained in *a number of* ^{of} ~~such~~ important matters, ^{of} ~~as~~ e.g. the qualifications and conditions of service of teachers in the Provinces, compulsory education of pupils, the responsibility of parents, and the spirit and character of education provided in the schools.

In this way differences, which had for many years existed between the Provinces in connection with these matters, were removed. The result was that dissatisfaction ^{which had} ~~resulting~~ from discrepancies in salary notches and scales of teachers in the Provinces came to an end; that parents now feel that they are being treated equally in all parts of the country; and that education in all the Provinces is being guided by and based on the same principles. The process is, of course, ^{yet} not complete but a good deal of headway

has been made, and we shall carry on in this direction.

South Africans have shown sincere satisfaction at these developments, because they understand clearly that the Republic can no longer afford the luxury of a piebald, chequered pattern of education. The Provinces also realise this, and are co-operating willingly and wholeheartedly with the ~~National~~ Education Council in trying to find a blueprint which will best serve our national interests in the future.

As far as objects and aims are concerned, we haven't got complete clarity, but we do know the general lines of what we want; and we do know a lot of detail. Our main, overriding aim has become clear from what has just been said: ^{we are trying} ~~to~~ evolve a system of education which will be truly national and in the best interests of South Africa as a whole.

We appreciate that this can be achieved only by making the best possible use of the potential of our young people. We are, ^{therefore,} ~~also~~ devoting serious and special attention to the ^{question} ~~matter~~ of differentiated education, so that young men and women can be educated in subjects and fields for which they are best suited, and in which they will have the greatest value for the country. It is for the same reason that we are conducting discussions with the Joint Matriculation Board on the question of university entrance for intending students.

We are hoping for a little more elasticity in the matter of university entrance, so that a greater measure of 4/..... differentiated education will be carried out not only in the schools but also in the universities.

A sine qua non for a successful system of differentiated education is, of course, a well-planned, scientific system of counselling, guidance and in many instances also aptitude testing for pupils. When talent and fields of interest, and aptitudes, have been established, it will become possible to provide the required type of differentiated tuition. The ~~National~~ Education Council has, therefore, found it necessary to give a lot of thought to the question of counselling and guidance.

It has become abundantly clear that these steps must be taken without delay, because our young people must be put to the best possible use in the service of the country. South Africa can no longer afford the luxury ^{in this case} of many square pegs in round holes.

I did say that we have neither the machinery, nor the intention, to revolutionise education. The machinery of the Council can be briefly explained as follows: The Council consists of 29 members, drawn from the Education Departments of the Provinces, the Department of Higher Education, Faculties of Education in the Universities, Afrikaners and English-speaking teachers' societies, and institutions for technical education, plus a few members appointed by the Minister in his own discretion. It will be seen that the Council can be regarded as ^{truly} ~~properly~~ representative of authorities and bodies in the field of Education.

To assist the Council in its day-to-day functions it is served by an Executive Committee of seven of its members, and the administrative staff of the Division of National Education. The machinery provided in this way has proved both functional and efficient.

There can be no question of our trying to revolutionise education. The Council realises this better than anybody else. *does not try to revolutionise, but it* The Council acts by means of advice to the Minister, and it will tender its advice to the Minister only after careful, patient discussion and consultation with the men and ^{the} authorities concerned.

We bear in mind that for more than half-a-century after the establishment of the Union of South Africa, education in the schools was, in accordance with the Union constitution, in the hands of the Provinces and that, during all these years, the Provinces built up their own Departments and systems of education. True enough, the differences which developed in the course of time, proved to a large extent undesirable, but it cannot be denied that the Provinces did excellent work in many respects. Starting practically from scratch they built schools, trained teachers and educated boys and girls. This, was done under most difficult circumstances, *especially* ~~and in spite of~~ a serious lack of funds. I am sure that we would never have stood where we are today had it not been for the ~~praiseworthy~~ ^{praiseworthy} efforts of the Provinces.

It is essential that we show respect for what has gone before *that we* and take into account what has happened. Indeed, we have to learn from the past and have to build on the foundations of the past.

That is why we cannot simply try to revolutionise, but have to first and foremost look for support and win confidence, in order to achieve what we are trying to do.

The Council also realises that the touchstone to the success of our education system is a wise and well-devised system of teacher training. The Council is at present actively engaged on this matter, and ~~is~~ ^{we are} delighted to ~~state~~ ^{say} that ~~it has~~ ^{we have} found, in informal discussions, sympathetic understanding and ready co-operation from the Universities, the Administrators, of the Provinces, the Directors of Education and all others concerned.

However, the Council believes that in all its deliberations and actions it must move patiently and tactfully. We might borrow a leaf from the book of British constitutional development and say: Not by the process of revolution, but by the process of evolution! We understand fully that in matters of the mind and the moods of men, things cannot be forced. This applies also to the field of Education, and especially in a country like South Africa, where there are people with widely different ^{ing} views, and views which are as a rule strongly expressed and enthusiastically advocated.

I can, therefore, sum it up in this way:

We will ~~therefore~~ go slowly, maintaining and guiding a process of evolution, but at the same time always keeping clearly in mind our main objects and aims.
