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"OF THINGS TO COME"

*A Citizens' Forum on Canada in the  
Post-war World*

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# The School Comes First

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## The School Comes First

The most telling characteristic of any society is *how it treats its children*. This reveals more about the nature of that society than any declarations or statistics. The standards actually achieved in nutrition, child protection, education, and so on, show very plainly what value a nation places on human life. Many recent books have portrayed the fascist ideal for children: submissive, fanatical soldiers in miniature. In the democratic countries a rising tide of concern about child welfare has been an earmark of the 20th century.

To-night we are going to discuss one aspect of child welfare: the educational system. Obviously, our schools are one of the great forces molding each new generation of Canadians to a pattern which may be good or bad. A better world must mean better education for our children. Let's look frankly at our schools, and see whether they are worthy of the world we are fighting for.

Much of the material we present comes from studies recently made by two bodies with authoritative knowledge of Canadian education: from the Survey Report of the Canada and Newfoundland Education Association, and from the report on reconstruction prepared by the Canadian Teachers' Federation.

### EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

"All Canadian children should be entitled without payment of fees by parents, without regard to place of residence and without regard to race, creed, personal wealth or social position, to an education to the limit of each child's ability." (Survey Report)

This is an objective which democratically minded citizens would at once accept. But how far have we achieved this in our Canadian schools?

It has been calculated that nearly three-quarters of our Canadian children now finish elementary school, about two-thirds start high school; one-quarter reach the level of school leaving or junior matriculation; about five percent go beyond senior matriculation (that is, to normal school or college) and only three percent reach the level of university graduation. It is hardly possible to interpret these figures except as evidence that we have not achieved equal opportunity.

Now if we consider university education, we find that tuition in Arts in Canadian universities cost in 1938-39, from \$25 to \$215 for a year. In most other courses it was more expensive. The average cost of board and lodgings was about \$222. Other necessary expenses run up the total cost to at least something like \$500. Thus, to send one child through college, unless a family lives in the same city as a university, a family budget must permit of \$500, on the average, being set aside for four years (less, of course,

whatever the student could earn by working). It is obvious that a family income must be considerably higher than \$1,500 for this to be possible.

Now fees are not nearly such a large bill of expense in high school. But there are thousands of districts where no high schools exist. Sending a child through high school thus may mean fees, cost of boarding in a town, and most important of all, postponement of earning power on the part of that member of the family. Nearly any school teacher can tell you about the pupils who have to leave school and go to work to support themselves, or to eke out the family's income.

What about scholarships to counteract this situation? They are virtually non-existent in high schools and technical schools. In Canadian universities, scholarships are, for the most part, grants-in-aid, often not large enough to cover more than a fraction of the cost of education. The average value of all undergraduate scholarships in 1937-38 was \$114. Only one in 10 Canadian undergraduates held a scholarship. In Western Canada, only one in 15 students could obtain a scholarship.

**Regional differences** The second obstacle to equality of opportunity in education in Canada is the difference between schools in different areas.

One Canadian province spends \$31.70 per child on education. Another province spends \$83.38 per child—two and a half times as much. This means in fact that our children are penalized as far as education goes if they are born in one part of the country rather than another.

Money for schools comes from two sources: local taxes mainly on property, and grants-in-aid from the provinces. The Rowell-Sirois Report demonstrated beyond contradiction that under the present allocation of taxation rights, as between the provinces and the dominion, those activities placed by the British North America Act under the provinces are bound to be inadequately financed, since the main tax revenues are in the hands of the Dominion. Education is one of these activities.

**Rural-urban differences** The property basis for school revenues lead to extreme differences not only between provinces, but between town, city and country schools as well. In one province the valuation of all the farms in a certain school section was \$5,000. This would be equal to the value of one average house in a city! No wonder these two contrasting pictures are drawn by the Survey Report:

"In the typical rural elementary school, the classrooms leave much to be desired. The classroom is almost a mere box, heated in winter by a crude

stove. Hygienic conditions are primitive, even if they exist at all, and the drinking water is brought in a pail from an adjoining farmhouse. One less well prepared and experienced teacher of eighteen or nineteen years of age teaches from four to ten grades, spreading the five or six hours of the day over all and instructing each grade for perhaps forty or fifty minutes only each day. She receives a salary of perhaps six hundred dollars for a ten months' term. She has never attended a summer school and reads no professional books or magazines. The number of subjects offered is limited by the number of the pupils in the school and the capacities of one teacher. Sanitary conditions are often disgusting. Though vacant lots often adjoin the school no use is made of them for health or athletic purposes. Clubs are practically unknown—a large percentage of rural schools throughout Canada operate under conditions somewhat similar to the above."

Of the 20,610 schools in Canada, 14,692 have one teacher only. Another 1,430 have two teachers each. Three-quarters of our Canadian schools approximate the picture suggested above, at least as far as teaching staff is concerned.

Here, in contrast, is a city school.

"In a typical Canadian city school system, the classrooms are large and well lighted, both naturally and artificially, well trained and experienced teachers give their full time to a single class, or subject specialists instruct a limited number of classes. A wide choice of subjects is open to pupils in the high school. Sanitary conditions are the best procurable. Gymnasium facilities are provided, with swimming pools adjoining in some cases. Playing fields lie adjacent and there are instructors for all the major sports and for field and track events. Clubs are offered to meet all tastes."

The Survey Report suggests however, that this difference between the city school and the country one is by no means necessary. Good schools can be built in the country. It describes a situation where this has been successfully accomplished.

"To meet rural needs a composite high school was built by seven rural school districts which were consolidated into one district for this purpose. The school is located in the open country twenty-five miles from any village. The small schools of the district still remain and accommodate pupils up to Grade 6. The Grades above 6 are transported to the central school which is organized on the junior-senior plan. In Grades 7, 8, and 9 the full academic course is carried forward and the pupils spend about twenty-five percent of their time in General Shop. In Grades 10 and 11, three distinct departments are organized, namely: agricultural, home economics and college preparatory."

"Many Canadian Schools have no sanitary conveniences of any kind, while the principal of the school is a graduate in agriculture, and the chief function of the school is to prepare pupils to succeed in the home community, in which the chief vocation is agriculture. The subjects taught are the same as those referred to above. Before this school was established, the children had no means of attending high school while living in their own homes. Now they have the opportunity of taking a sound academic high school course and receiving special preparation to enter either college or the vocations followed in the area. The teachers engaged are generally mature and experienced, attend summer school and read professional literature rather widely."

"From a three department composite high school established twenty-five years ago, over six hundred boys have graduated in the department of agriculture alone. Of these, over eighty-five percent have prospered on farms. This shows the possibility of providing good secondary educational opportunities in rural areas and preparing students with the necessary technical training with which to develop the resources of the areas served."

**Discrimination** The third obstacle to equal opportunity suggested by the Survey Report is discrimination against children because of their racial or religious background. This is most difficult to pin down, in a concrete way, than our other problems. It is, however, equally important. It may exist in the attitudes of Anglo-Saxon children to the "foreign" child. If a child starts life with his race or creed held against him, we clearly have no equality in our schools.

#### HOW GOOD ARE OUR SCHOOLS?

**School Plant** "It will be necessary to improve and replace the present unsatisfactory elementary rural school buildings and to erect many rural high school buildings in areas now not served with secondary schools. After the war, the fundamental urgency for a better democracy will force all authorities to enter upon a large building programme for rural Canada. Thousands of rural schools are dingy and dirty, without modern heating, landscaping, ventilation, water supply, lighting, playgrounds or library facilities. At present many are neither safe nor sanitary. To remove or modernize them is an urgent need . . . in connection with the administration of rural high schools many students will require either to be conveyed some distance from their homes to central schools or to be supplied with hostels or dormitories near the schools. In many cases, it will be found more economical and convenient to build hostels or to pay boarding expenses than to transport the pupils. To supply these hostels and dormitories and to provide board and lodging costs will require a considerable sum of money in the rural building programme."

Dingy, dirty, unsanitary schools are not found in rural districts alone. Many of our city schools are equally overcrowded, ill-ventilated and out-moded.

**Health** The health of our school children cannot be safe-guarded unless we have proper buildings. The Survey Report points out:

"Many Canadian schools have no sanitary conveniences of any kind, while the lack of sanitary conditions in other schools both rural and urban is a menace to health and morals. Only in schools in privileged areas is medical and dental care provided and even there the follow-up work is scarcely thorough enough . . ."

Buildings are not enough, however. Health depends on nutrition, and nutrition varies directly with family income. The problem of healthy school children is partly a question of good buildings, good school environment and play space. It is also a matter of the proper food at home, and proper medical inspection at school.

**Teachers' salaries** Half the teachers in Canada receive less than \$782 a year! In fact, teachers are one of the lowest paid categories of professional workers. The Survey Report says:

"The present salaries paid to teachers are not sufficient to attract the right kind of person in adequate numbers."

It is only because men and women work for incentives other than economic returns alone that our educational system has been as good as it is. But here are two of the results: a high turnover of teachers in the rural schools, which are generally the lowest paid; teachers leaving schools for other jobs which will pay them more,—a trend which has been intensified during the war.

**Specialization** One further point must be noted about our schools. We are barely beginning to adapt our education to the needs of the vocational life our children will lead. There are only a handful of technical schools in the cities. There are only a few schools offering courses adapted to the needs of boys

and girls who will be living on the land. For the most part, our high schools give a course training people only for college entrance and for commercial life.

#### EDUCATION AND THE WAR

These lacks in our educational system have been emphasized by the war. We have been wasting manpower because we have not keyed our educational system to children's needs, because we have not provided equality of opportunity for all Canadian children. In wartime we have found ourselves tragically short of properly trained personnel—from doctors and dentists to draughtsmen. We have had to speed up our college courses, and set up special training on a temporary and sometimes haphazard basis. Many small schools in this country have not been able to open this year. They could find no teachers. The situation is so serious that teachers have been frozen in their profession.

#### AFTER THE WAR

Education is a problem for the post-war period, but it is also a problem for the present moment. Can we afford to let our children continue to attend schools without sanitary facilities, schools so desperately over-crowded in some cities that children had to stay away for a few weeks until they could be squeezed in?

If such problems are not tackled immediately they will very shortly be desperate. A major building programme will have to wait till the end of the war for necessary material, labour and money. But in the post-war period, thousands of returned servicemen, who have already indicated their desire to complete interrupted schooling or to take further training will pour into our schools.

The Survey Report has worked out a comprehensive programme for the reconstruction of education. We shall report their suggestions briefly here, for your discussion and evaluation.

#### A PROGRAMME FOR OUR SCHOOLS

**Health** An exhaustive survey should be made at once of the health needs in the school. All schools should be provided with adequate medical, dental, nursing and immunization services; there should be an effort to see that diseases are treated. Hot lunches should be provided to correct diet deficiencies.

**Administration** Larger units of administration are the only solution to the basic financial and material problems of good schools. A large building programme will be needed to renovate old schools, eliminate unsanitary conditions, and supply new buildings. An equalization fund should help weaker school districts provide better educational facilities.

**Teachers' salaries** Teachers' salaries should be increased as rapidly as possible until the median salary (i.e. the salary above and below which there are equal numbers) is \$1,321. The number of men teachers should be increased until they become 40% of the total number of teachers.

**Curriculum** "Composite high schools should be located in advantageous locations so that rural children may benefit from diversified curricula such as college preparatory, commercial, agricultural, industrial and home economics." Some 1,500 extra teachers should be engaged to give personal and vocational guidance to children.

A system of scholarships (at a cost of about \$3 million a year) should be set up so that gifted children can continue their education.

**Costs** These are only a few of the major recommendations. How much would all this cost?

"To facilitate the improvements recommended in this report the previously unthought of sum of \$203,262,000 is needed. Though this amount seems large, it should be considered in the light of two facts. The first is that this figure does not provide for anything that is fantastically idealistic. It represents the expenditures needed for a very moderate, practicable advance in education quite in keeping with the aspirations and temperament of the Canadian people. This advance is within the nation's reach as soon as the necessity for vast war expenditure is past. The second is that improvement in education need not be delayed for the provision of the full financial support suggested. An increase of 100 percent in educational expenditure may be beyond the immediate ability of the nation to pay, but any substantial addition to present revenue will permit the realization of at least part of the suggestions here made."

**Teachers' Federation Report** The Canadian Teachers' Federation supports these recommendations of the Survey Report and lays particular stress on the necessity of providing high enough teachers' salaries to attract young men and women of the best character and ability. They place emphasis on cooperative and democratic methods of teaching. They also recommend that a school building and remodelling programme should be given a high priority in the post-war reconstruction plans to achieve full employment.

These teachers have given considerable thought to the problem of handling the educational needs of demobilized men and women. They suggest that plans should be made now to turn war-training facilities into educational institutions; that teachers in the armed services should be demobilized speedily at the close of hostilities and used in this type of education.

The Federation Report says quite frankly:

"While believing in Provincial autonomy in educational matters, we believe that Federal Aid for education is possible without Federal control . . . the plain truth is that education never can be raised to the status that it should occupy in a democratic society unless the Dominion Government provides the necessary money in liberal grants on the basis of needs."

They also press for scholarship aid to include not only the cost of tuition but living allowances where such are necessary. Finally, they urge that the school must be a community centre.

#### MORE INFORMATION

*Report of the Survey Committee of the Canada and Newfoundland Education Association.* Can be obtained free of charge from the Canadian Association for Adult Education, 198 College St., Toronto. A most comprehensive report on the needs in Canadian education with actual estimates of expenditures necessary.

*Report of the Canadian Teachers' Federation on Reconstruction in Education.*

Can be obtained without charge from above address.

The view of Canadian teachers on post-war problems, and their programme for education.

*Education and Government.* A pamphlet with speeches by B. Claxton, G. Graydon, and M. Coldwell, on federal policy towards education. Free, from Wartime Information Board, Ottawa.

#### FILMS

##### SCHOOL DAYS IN THE COUNTRY

How teachers and pupils in a country school go about taking care of their health. (Running time—25 minutes)

##### CARRY ON CHILDREN

A short film on the public health measures in English schools. Available from National Film Society—one print only. (Running time—10 minutes)

### REPORT QUESTIONS

- I. What are the most important steps towards providing equal opportunity for education in Canada?
- II. Do you think teachers should earn higher salaries?
- III. Do you think there should be a "composite high school" (as described above) in your community?

**SEND YOUR ANSWERS TO YOUR PROVINCIAL OFFICES**

### THINGS TO DO

1. Find out what health measures are carried out in the schools in your community; e.g. medical and dental inspection, hot lunches, and so on. Examine the facilities and discuss whether they are adequate, how they might be improved.
2. Hold a meeting with the principal and teachers of your school, and discuss with them what improvements need to be made in your school plant, how much they would cost, and how the money might be provided.
3. Find out how many men in your unit of the services want to continue interrupted education or take further training after the war. What kind of training do they want?

### FURTHER QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What educational services do you think should be provided for the men discharged from the armed forces? Should these be extended to cover boys and girls who went into war-work before they finished their education? workers discharged from war-plants?
2. Should a system of state scholarships cover high school as well as university? Should they cover: part of tuition? entire tuition? living allowance?
3. Do you think the school leaving age should be raised from 16 to 18 years? Why or why not?
4. Do you think a larger administrative unit is necessary in your school districts? Why or why not?
5. How should the costs of improved education in Canada be distributed as between tax-payers, provinces and dominion?
6. The Canadian Teachers' Federation recommends that the school should be a community centre, and should have the facilities to make this possible (in the way of space, equipment, etc.). Discuss what this might contribute to your community, and what changes would be necessary in the school.

**Next Week: A MAN'S OWN CASTLE.**

