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Charting the course of Canadian Education

Education, in the opinion of the Economic Council of Canada, is Canada's biggest industry.¹ It is also, perhaps, the most complicated and the most vital. It is complicated, because in a federal state a combined effort is required, not only among individuals and institutions, but among two or three levels of government. It is vital, since education contributes not only to economic prosperity and social stability, but to the comfort, enrichment and satisfaction of the individual citizen as well. With a larger proportion of her population engaged in full-time study than any other industrial nation, Canada's commitment to education is substantial and Canadians are naturally concerned with the effective operation of their educational systems.

The Report of Alberta's Commission on Educational Planning is an important addition to the literature of Canadian education, particularly to the growing number of volumes on educational reform and planning. It is not a conventional document. Unlike many studies in the other provinces, and previous studies in Alberta, this report covers the whole range of educational services, not just one sector or one level. It probes into the operation of the present system in Alberta, yet it also throws light on inter-provincial and federal-provincial issues. It is oriented toward the future, using targets like 1980, 1990 and even the centennial year 2005, yet it is firmly rooted in the realities of present practice and policy. Although it does not offer formal recommendations, it is studded with proposals and suggestions and the final chapter specifies ten "priority actions". Finally, the report was obviously written by the chairman, Dr. Walter Worth, who notes in the introduction that he was assisted by a "Commission Board" of seven members not all of whom concurred in some of his views.

Because of its timeliness and its interest to all Canadians, it may be most satisfactory to consider the Report in four settings: against the background of other similar studies in Canada, against the background of Alberta, in the context of future planning, and in regard to its importance for Canada as a whole.

¹*Patterns of Growth*, Economic Council of Canada, Seventh Annual Review, 1970. Ottawa: Queen's Printer. p. 55

I

Educational reform is difficult in a federal state. The involvement of several governments results in a natural reluctance to agree on common objectives or to proceed at a uniform pace. The process has been particularly difficult in Canada, where ten provincial systems have evolved in several stages during the course of a century, borrowing sometimes from one another but more frequently from models originating in Europe or the United States. Three different procedures have been used in the attempt to change existing systems; none has proven fully effective.

When the issue of technical education was raised at the turn of the century, the leaders of industry, commerce and labour approached the federal government to examine the needs and provide some measure of co-ordination and support. As a result of these appeals, a Royal Commission on Industrial Training and Technical Education was appointed with the consent of all the provincial premiers.² An impressive report was submitted in 1913, providing an inventory of existing facilities and programs as well as some proposals for co-operative action. World War I intervened and it was 1919 before a modified plan was finally adopted. Reforms were introduced slowly and unevenly from province to province and the reasons for these inconsistencies included objection to federal involvement, lack of resources, failure to adopt provincial structures and the varying degree of pressure from industrial groups. This procedure has not been repeated.

During and after World War II, political leaders and the public became deeply concerned about reconstruction. Soon after the outbreak of hostilities, the federal government named a Committee on Demobilization and Rehabilitation which focussed attention on the broad problems of reconstruction. Educational leaders were invited to collaborate in planning for future development and a Survey Committee, consisting of deputy-ministers of education, was appointed by the Canada and Newfoundland Education Association (now the Canadian Education Association) to examine the needs of the provincial systems.

The report of this committee was published in 1943 and it covered such subjects as health, administration, personnel, curricula, adult education and finance. The forty-five recommendations were by no means radical. They called for the equalization of school facilities, a median salary for teachers of at least \$1,321, broader curricula, improved guidance and the establishment of junior colleges.³ A second document entitled "Trends" was distributed the following year and it described new plans

²Canada, Parliament, Report of the Royal Commission on Industrial Training and Technical Education. 1913-14. Stamp, Robert M. *Technical Education, National Policy, and Federal-Provincial Relations in Canadian Education, 1899-1919*. Canadian Historical Review, vol. lli, No. 4, December 1971, pp 404ff.

³*Report of the Survey Committee*, Canada and Newfoundland Education Association, 1943. pp 78-80.

for teacher training, financial and administrative reforms, a high school program for all, as well as programs in citizenship, moral and religious studies.⁴ After the war, in collaboration with the Canadian Chamber of Commerce and other public bodies, the association sponsored other national studies on practical education, student health, the status of teachers and school finance.

Meanwhile, a voluntary group — the Canadian Youth Commission — had been formed in 1943 under the chairmanship of Dr. Sydney Smith, President of the University of Toronto. In one of a series of publications, *Youth Challenges the Educators*, it reported on a nation-wide survey of youth opinion and, supporting the recommendations of the Canadian Education Association Survey, it called upon federal and provincial governments to share responsibility for assuring equal educational opportunity to all Canadians.⁵

Although this national approach to the challenge of educational reform aroused public attention and made political leaders better aware of the issues they must face in expanding services and meeting the costs, the concrete measures were left to the provinces. Having been made aware of the need to modernize their systems, provincial governments sought advice on how to proceed by appointing royal commissions, special committees, or task forces to prepare specific plans for reform. Studies of this type have now been completed in all the provinces. The first were initiated in Ontario and British Columbia before the war ended; another six commissions were appointed in other provinces during the 1950's; six more reported in the 1960's; and three are still at work. The mandate of most of these commissions was limited to one aspect or level of education — school organization, curriculum, finance, higher, technical or adult education — but in three provinces, Québec, Newfoundland and, now, Alberta, the studies cover all phases of education.

In addition to these provincial enquiries, several national surveys have been conducted by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada in co-operation with other interested groups. The Bladen report on *Financing Higher Education in Canada* (1965); the Duff-Berdahl report on *University Government in Canada* (1966); and the Hurtubise-Rowat report on *The University, Society and Government* (1970) provide an overview of university problems. A further study on the rationalization of research in Canadian universities has just been completed and a report will be issued shortly. Together with the reports of the provincial commissions, these documents represent an impressive volume of informed opinion about the state of education in Canada and the prospects for the future.

Dr. Worth's report ranks well among these publications. The approach is fresh and original. The text is addressed to the general reader, who

⁴*Trends in Education*, Canada and Newfoundland Education Association, 1944.

⁵*Youth Challenges the Educators*, Canadian Youth Commission, Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1946. p. 146.

may find the format awkward but may be attracted by the lavish illustrations. The document deals with the whole range of educational problems; it is firmly based in the present practices of Alberta; and it is uninhibited in the proposals it makes for future changes. It will certainly stir controversy in academic and professional circles, but the critical question will be the reception it receives among the younger generation and student groups who appear to have contributed a good deal to the Commission's deliberations. It is they who will lose most if the reforms are compromised.

II

For the outside observer, at least, there is a temptation to compare this report with the one prepared a dozen years ago by Alberta's Royal Commission on Education, under the chairmanship of Senator Donald Cameron.⁶ The setting was somewhat different. The Cameron Commission was appointed in 1957 to make "a comprehensive survey of the various phases of the elementary and secondary school systems of the province with particular attention to programs of study and pupil achievement." Its membership included representatives of the general public; its submission was in the form of a majority report and a vigorous dissenting opinion; and, in the traditional form, it offered the government 280 specific recommendations. In contrast, the present document covers all aspects of education. It was prepared by professional educators and does not bear the marks of any serious differences of opinion among the members. The closest it comes to recommendations is the ten "priority actions" listed in the final chapter. The contrast in tone and organization is probably also significant. The Cameron report is divided into 34 chapters, each dealing with a specific issue or problem in direct and concrete language. Dr. Worth has arranged his text in 6 chapters, bearing titles that are abstract or even in some instances obscure. Moreover the diction and opinions are more abstract and general, and the judgments are not supported by references or footnotes.

Questions naturally arise. Do the differences reflect the changing temper of the 1960's? Do the two reports demonstrate an aroused public interest in education and a greater sophistication in dealing with the issues? If laymen — or some representative women — had been added to Dr. Worth's "Commission Board", would the results have been the same? Most important of all, will the government act more positively in the 1970's than it did a decade ago, when the Minister of Education reported to the Legislature that he was prepared to accept only half of Senator Cameron's recommendations?

Dr. Worth notes that the general goals for education have not changed much since the province was founded in 1905 and that public opinion in

⁶*Report of the Royal Commission on Education, Alberta.* Edmonton: Queen's Printer, 1959.

1969 was no different from what it was when Senator Cameron tested it in 1959. (P. 46). Nevertheless, the emphasis on "intellectualism" which was mentioned in the Cameron report was probably diluted in the 1960's as the demands for universal and continuing education became more insistent. Dr. Worth adopts four ideals: futures perspective, lifelong learning, participatory planning and autonomous individuals. He translates these first into principles, then into goals and, finally, into functions which are to be realized through four stages of recurring education. (pp. 45-61)

The four stages — early education, basic education, higher education and further education — are to be organized and administered under two government departments: the Department of Education and the Department of Advanced Education. By assigning two of these stages to each department, the responsibilities are equally divided, especially since early and further education are at present in need of active development in Alberta. Considering the magnitude of the task, the division may be justified, but co-ordination of policies and services will not be easy to achieve even with the complicated structures that are proposed. The dangers of conflict, rivalry and duplication are so obvious that the report even suggests the eventual possibility of establishing a single Department of Recurrent Education.

Like Senator Cameron, Dr. Worth supports the principle of decentralization. Now, however, it may be attained more effectively through county units than by the present pattern of district authorities. The report notes that 18-year-olds are now eligible for election as school trustees and insists that teachers must have the same privilege. School councils are to be organized to bring parents and local residents into closer relationship with the school and, in the governing bodies of colleges and universities, there should be representation of faculty and students, although laymen, representing the general public, should be in a majority.

On the issue of separate schools, the Cameron Commission advised the government to resist any steps toward a dual system.⁸ The Worth report is more equivocal, apparently assuming that a dual system exists. It points out, however, that constitutional guarantees of minority rights and recent human rights legislation appear to be on a collision course. In dealing with these problems, it appears that Dr. Worth was not fully informed about the school board structure in Halifax and this matter should be further examined.⁹

⁷Canadian Press report, March 21, 1960. The Minister of Education, Mr. Aalborg, was quoted as saying in the legislature that the government had accepted 146 of the 280 recommendations of the Commission.

⁸Report of the Royal Commission on Education, *op. cit.* pp. 271-272

⁹Report of the Commission on Educational Planning, *op. cit.* p. 125. Under Nova Scotia law there is no provision for separate schools or separate school representation on school boards. Through local agreement, however, certain schools may be reserved for pupils of a certain religious faith and staffed by personnel of that faith.

Throughout the discussion of structures, Dr. Worth places strong emphasis on participation to be achieved within institutions through the recognition of student and teacher responsibility; at the local level, through advisory committees and school councils; at the level of the departments, by giving the public access to planning, support and service units; and at the government level, through the Education Council of Alberta which reports directly to the Cabinet "as a sort of auditor-general . . . to evaluate our system of schooling on a systematic and comprehensive basis." (p. 138)

III

The Report bears the title: *A Future of Choices — A Choice of Futures*, and the accent on futurism carries the imprint of Herman Kahn and Alvin Toffler. At the outset, the reader is told that the central question is a choice between a "Second-Phase Industrial Society and a Person-Centred Society." Three hundred pages later Dr. Worth states his preference, which has been made clear throughout the document, and it is, of course, the Person-Centred Society. This approach robs the report of much of its objectivity, especially when it is characterized as a "launching pad" for the transformation of education and society. (p. 301)

This open advocacy of one of the alternatives will probably alarm traditionalists, but it should not obscure the exposition of the learning process and the imaginative description of the Alberta Academy which are among the best features of the book.

Recognizing education as a lifelong process, not an experience terminated in childhood or youth and limited to classrooms, the Report insists that the learner must be the centre of all learning activity. This fact is not new. It has been recognized by good teachers in all generations. However, in the last twenty years it has taken on new significance with the rapid development of new mass media. Examining the actual procedures in the schools and universities, the Commission asserts: "What is going on in the classrooms of Alberta is massive testimony to the utter neglect of the learner's innate ability to solve problems. The objectives we apparently seem to pursue most are those of repetition, replication and obedience to traditional procedures." (p. 198) Had the examination extended beyond the boundaries of Alberta, the judgment would probably not have been any less severe. The attention given to early education and to further education is fully justified. Indeed this is one of the few studies of Canadian education that gives a proper balance to early, basic and continuing education, as well as to the formal and informal experiences which contribute to the process.

The Alberta Academy is the key to what is described in the Report as the "new delivery system." Obviously this proposal is inspired by the example of the Open University in Great Britain, but it is better adapted

to Canadian needs than other similar projects suggested to date. It would be open to everyone; it would offer no degrees; it would offer a wide range of courses, most of which would carry credit in other provincial institutions. Without any fixed administrative structures or buildings, it would operate through radio, television, tutorials and corresponding programs as well as through community and social activities. The emphasis would not be on mass education through mass media; but on individual instruction through efficient management and technical resources.

Supplemented and supported by ACCESS (Alberta Communications Centre for Educational Services and Systems) and by Learning Resource Units set up in various centres of the province, the Academy would bring into play the full force of the new learning media. Since it is generally agreed that new technological developments have not been used properly or sufficiently up to the present time, a concentrated effort must be made at once to employ them in the educational process.

The management of these ventures will be difficult, for they will require leadership with a high degree of ingenuity, patience, technical skill, scholarship and public spirit. The blue-prints of the Commission will probably have to be altered or adjusted but the objectives may be attained if the administrators who manage the operation are as skilled and farsighted as the architects who designed them.

IV

At several points the Report touches on issues that implicate the other provinces or Canada as a whole. The question therefore arises, in making the fundamental choice between the Second-Phase Industrial and Person-Centred Societies, what would happen if Albertans were to choose one alternative and other Canadians or North Americans chose the other? There are also many areas where common action among the provinces would be either desirable or necessary. The Report stresses the need for Canadian studies, language training and other core subjects in the curriculum. In dealing with the learning media, it points to the obvious need for co-ordination of television, radio and computer programs. It emphasises the increasing mobility of Canadians and demands a system for the exchange of academic credits. The structure proposed is predicated on continuing financial aid from the federal government. Probably for the first time in a provincial report of this kind these issues are brought into focus in proposals for inter-provincial and federal-provincial co-operation. (pp. 148-149) Thus, it may be said, the Report accepts the realities of Canadian nationhood in 1972 and offers solutions to ensure future development.

The Worth Report could serve as a first step in a more systematic approach to national planning. It indicates new directions for education that must sooner or later be considered by all the provinces, and it

proposes structures which may be adapted to the traditions and social patterns of different regional areas and cultural groups. It suggests new institutional structures that may be integrated with those in other provinces and challenges educational and political leaders to find a workable basis for common action.

A French edition of the Report would be useful to ensure wide circulation in the French-speaking community. While it may be assumed that those with a special interest in education will be served by the English text, a French version would reach a much wider public and every reader finds a certain satisfaction in being addressed in his mother tongue. The Parent Report in Québec was probably the first educational document of its kind to be published in both official languages and this made it readily available not only to the public of Quebec, but also to the other provinces and elsewhere outside Canada.¹⁰ Moreover, the practice of publishing such reports in two languages may have a certain value in improving the precision and quality of the text. If bilingualism is to be accepted as a characteristic of Canadian culture, its application in education is a necessary first step.

Since 1960 there have been commission studies on one or more aspects of education in each of the provinces and the examination of education in Canada has never been more intensive or less co-ordinated. Inevitably, since most of the provinces have conducted their enquiries in piecemeal fashion, there are wide gaps and there has been some duplication. The reports cannot be said to provide a systematic inventory either of the needs or the resources and, although they go deeper than earlier federal or national studies of technical education and educational reform, they are less consistent and they do not appear to have moved the various governments any closer to agreement on common objectives or united action. Using Dr. Worth's divisions of early, basic, higher and further education, it would be useful to compare these recent studies in search of some common denominators and to explore the possibility of co-operative measures.

But co-operation must go further. Recent provincial initiatives have revealed a fatal weakness arising from the lack of research, statistics and information on Canadian education. To leave these to the discretion of provincial authorities is to undermine the very foundation of federalism. Research efforts by a dozen independent commissions are no substitute for a comprehensive common service in which all governments co-operate. Without a central office of education, such as Dr. Worth suggests, (p. 149) and a spirit of co-operation among all levels of government — federal, provincial and local — the systems of education can never function effectively in the interests of the Canadian public.

¹⁰*Rapport de la Commission Royale d'enquête sur l'Enseignement dans la province de Québec*, and *Report of the Royal Commission of Enquiry on Education, Quebec*. 5 volumes, 1963-66. Québec; Government Printer.