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crisis of teacher supply

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During the present year a Press campaign largely in the Transvaal, and to a lesser extent in Natal, has made the public aware of the existence of a crisis in the supply of teachers particularly to secondary schools in the country. Organisations such as the English Academy of Southern Africa, the South African Council for English Education and, in particular, the Council for Education, Witwatersrand, have brought home in stark reality the crisis situation as it exists at the present time. However, in fairness it must be stated that the country was warned of the growing seriousness of the situation almost a decade ago. Consider the following quotation:

> "It must be appreciated . . . that, irrespective of any measures taken to improve teachers' conditions, the profession will have to accept a smaller proportion of people of outstanding talent than it has received in the past. . . . Teaching is competing more and more with other professions for available talent. It cannot hope to receive more than its fair share of this talent, and that fair share will fall as the total demand for this talent rises. This does not mean that the status of the teaching profession will necessarily fall relative to other professions. All professions will face this problem." [1]

Thus the 1961 Education Panel 14 years ago foresaw first a deterioration in quality of entrant to the profession, and with competition for man- and woman-power a decline in numbers of entrants to teaching.

The inference to be drawn from the above is that there is likely to be an across-the-board deterioration particularly in the quality of teacher recruits with an ultimate decline in the numbers coming forward. This situation is further complicated by the difference of attitude to teaching as a career by the two cultural communities which constitute the White group in South Africa. In an official report on "The Teacher" issued in May 1968 it is stated inter alia that:

> "Proportionately too few English-speaking Standard X pupils choose teaching as a profession. Research shows . . . that only 16.0% of all prospective teachers are English-speaking, as against 78,1% who are Afrikaans-speaking. It may be inferred from this that the teaching profession is less popular among English-speaking than among Afrikaans-speaking pupils." [2]

In considering the problems of the recruitment and supply of teachers to schools in a period of crisis, it is necessary to ask as a first question, "Why should there be a difference in attitude to the teaching profession?" There is little doubt, for example, that in communities where there is a strong Calvinist tradition, the position of the schoolmaster has usually been a prestigious one. An illustration of this is the relatively high regard in which the Scottish schoolmaster or dominee has traditionally been held compared with his counterpart in England. Traditionally the schoolmaster in Holland as well as those of the old Cape Colony and the republics have also been held in high esteem. There is no doubt also that as the influence of this Calvinist tradition in education has weakened, so has the influence of the teacher in the community. This has happened in Scotland and it would appear to be part of a cultural evolution linked to economic opportunity which is being experienced by the Calvinist community in South Africa at the present time. It is this difference in attitude which was responsible initially for the difference in recruitment of English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking students to teaching. The change in attitude to teaching would now appear to be affecting both groups in the community.

In a recent investigation into the question of the supply of English-speaking teachers, the English Academy of Southern Africa found a number of factors were influencing potentially good students against teaching as a career.[3] These included:

1. The feeling that promotion prospects in a teaching career were linked almost solely to competence in the official languages. The potential recruit feels that he can have little place in the educational hierarchy and often does not feel himself attracted to the more extreme forms of Christian and national aspects of a highly centralised system of education;

2. Overlarge classes that make for regimentation and rigidity of organisation, heavy marking loads and excessive prescription of work make the profession unattractive to many English-speaking students and especially to potential teachers of English as a subject;

3. Observation and experience of this situation as a pupil makes the student disinclined to enter the teaching profession. In addition, it has been averred that many English-medium schools do not encourage their pupils to undertake teaching as a career as purposefully as do many Afrikaans-medium schools and churches which present teaching as a service career in the promotion of Afrikaner culture;

4. It is felt that as a result of very high pass standards being set by some English-medium universities, many potentially satisfactory teachers of English are being driven away from the subject. The result is that English is taught increasingly both at the main and second language levels by non-native speakers of it. This must result in the development of a vicious circle in which more students are axed at university level.

5. Career prospects in other professions attract men students so that a considerable difference exists in the academic quality of male and female entrants to the profession. There is also a marked disparity in numbers of men compared with women. It is unusual to find male students of outstanding academic calibre choosing teaching as a career.

While the foregoing factors undoubtedly affect the supply of English-speaking teachers in South Africa today, there appear to be a number of others of general application which must also be borne in mind. Roger Wilson draws attention to the first of these when he remarks that, "Traditionally, schooling has been an activity in which the whole initiative has lain with the teachers to bring up the young so that they join the adult world on the adult's terms. This is workable in a world where change from generation to generation is relatively slow, where there is relatively little expectation of social mobility away from class origins and relatively little foundation for a massive sense of youth solidarity".[4]

Wilson goes on to say that this pattern of relationship has by no means been destroyed, but it is thoroughly shaken "because enough of the young doubt the validity of the assumption that the authority of the grown-ups — their wisdom, if you like — is self-evident. As the grown-ups we tend to resent this loss of unquestioned authority and it sets a particularly difficult problem for our schools".

But, he warns, we shall do better to think about the issue than to resent it, "for the change is not temporary".[5] What must be borne in mind today is that the roles and the functions of the teacher in society are changing. The thinking, discerning youth may not wish to cast himself in the traditional role of the teacher in our society. At the same time he is uncertain about committing himself to the more modern and less clearly defined diffuse roles which he sees himself required to fill. Many writers have drawn attention to the doubts and insecurities to which the teacher, perhaps more than other professional practitioners tends to be exposed.

> "Bryan Wilson . . . emphasises the diffuseness of the role of the teacher, concerned as she is with a whole person over a long period of time; socialisation is a never ending process. This he contrasts with the practitioner in law, concerned only with a person's delictual acts, or in medicine, dealing with someone's disturbed health. 'Diffuse roles are likely to embody internal role-conflicts because of the absence of clear lines of demarcation whereby the role player knows when he has done his job'." [6]

Added to this is the uncertainty experienced by many mature teachers in respect of the new differentiated curriculum and examination requirements. It would seem that this pressure is encouraging a number of teachers to consider their continuance in the profession with the result that there is a possibility of accelerated wastage of teachers during the period of adaptation of the new pattern in the educational system.

A further factor which induces the student to give serious thought to entering the teaching profession is the view which society itself has of the profession. This includes naturally the profession's view of itself. It has long been argued that it is vitally necessary to improve the status of the profession. The National

Advisory Education Council noted in 1968 that

> "By virtue of the fundamental importance of teaching, which is concerned with the education of the future citizens of the country and is thus also intimately concerned with the whole future of the nation, the teaching profession should be held in high esteem by the public. Nevertheless the fact is that the teaching profession has not always compared favourably with other professions . . . (It has) been pointed out that the general public underestimates the value of teaching because . . . it does not produce immediate and tangible results." [7]

One of the terms of reference given to the Gericke Commission[8] was to recommend ways in which the status of the profession might be raised. A direct result of this is the proposal to establish a professional teacher's council which will control, among other things, professional registration and membership. While it is hoped that this move will improve the standing of the profession, it must be clearly remembered that professional status is intimately concerned with the profession's view of itself. This is a matter of general concern which extends far beyond the boundaries of this country. Kelsall and Kelsall report that

> "Ever since the end of the last war international discussions on the status of teachers have been taking place. . . . There was the obvious contradiction between the importance universally attached to education on the one hand and the relatively low regard in which its practitioners tended, very often, to be held in terms of both social esteem and material rewards on the other." [9]

They claim that the likely result will be translation into practice of "the ILO/UNESCO Charter aiming to secure adequate status for nearly 20 million school teachers throughout the world".[10]

Undoubtedly the establishment of the General Teaching Council in Scotland has done much to improve the status of the teaching profession in that country which has traditionally regarded its teachers comparatively highly. It is sincerely hoped that a similar professional body will achieve similar success in this country. In this respect it must not only appear to be an autonomous professional body but prove to be so, for it is surely the hallmark of the respected professional organisations in medicine, law, accountancy and the like that they have autonomous professional control of their membership. Until this is achieved it is unlikely that the status of the teaching profession will be raised and this will continue to be a factor militating against the recruitment of persons of outstanding ability to the profession.

Mention has been made of the fact that the teaching profession has also been held in low esteem in terms of material rewards. There is no doubt that conditions of service in the teaching profession have improved markedly in the third quarter of the present century. In making this statement, however, the fundamental nature of the improvement must be recognised. The material rewards of teaching as a career have improved relative to what they were, not relative to the rewards offered to members of other established professions or to commerce or industry generally. At the same time in many parts of the world the improvements have been achieved by what has been regarded by some as behaviour unbefitting professional people. In a survey conducted in England by the National Union of Teachers[11] it was stated that

> "people took up teaching because it was a family tradition, because it was a safe job or because they were not good enough to do anything else. It was also stated that qualifications were not needed to become teachers, and that teachers were ignorant of the world of industry and paid scant attention to increasing their own productivity or maintaining high standards. The traditional attitude also persisted that because teaching was a vocation its practitioners should not engage in the sordid scramble for higher pay. Thus the image of the teacher which emerged was, in some respects, highly unflattering, the implication being that, as a group, they did not merit higher rewards than they were currently receiving." [12]

Reference has been made to the noticeable higher academic quality of female entrants to the profession compared with males. There is some evidence to believe that this state of affairs may not continue indefinitely in South Africa, at least among potential English-speaking women teachers in training. It has been noticed by the writer that a considerable number of women university students who in the past would. in the main, have entered the teaching profession, now state that they have no intention of doing so. The

pressure of manpower demands is resulting in these students turning elsewhere, a popular choice of career being graduate secretarial courses leading to absorption into the commercial world. Three reasons are advanced by these students for this decision: firstly the demands made upon teachers by the increasing difficulty of the task; secondly the lack of promotion prospects in a rigidly centralised and male dominated system of control and, thirdly, the inadequacy of financial rewards in a system which continued to discriminate against women albeit to a lesser extent than in the past. It is predicted that as the demand for trained "brain" power increases, so will these factors increase in drawing good quality women students away from teaching as a career. It can almost be stated that this effect will, given the continued growth of the South African economy, tend to operate in the same manner as it has for male teachers. There is likely to be a reduction in the supply of good quality English-speaking women recruits. At one time it used to be said that the daughters of teachers frequently become teachers, while sons of teachers rarely did. Perhaps this saying is in danger of modification.

Conclusions:—

It would appear from the foregoing that teaching as a career for English-speaking students is not increasing in popularity for the reasons stated. At the same time it is vitally necessary that this situation should not be accepted as inevitable either by the national community nor by the English-speaking sector of it. It is essential that the supply of good quality recruits to the profession should be maintained if education at all levels and national progress itself is to continue.

What can be done to assist in overcoming or alleviating the present crisis situation? It would appear that action can and must be undertaken under three collective headings. The first is the improvement of the image of the profession. Under this must come as a first requirement the proper professional control of the entry and registration of teachers by the profession itself. Plans are far advanced for the establishment of a Teachers' Council. This in itself, while a signal step forward, must not be seen as an end in itself. It is the first step only in the creation of community regard for the profession as a whole. It must always be a serious charge on all members of the profession that any Teachers' Council must be an all-embracing professional body and not one which becomes committed to the promotion of narrowly sectional interest within the profession. Having achieved such a council it must be the responsibility of all teachers to promote its professional growth and standing. Secondly, under this heading must come the promotion of the profession in all English-medium schools, both state and independent, with active encouragement to good quality candidates to enter the profession. Thirdly, employing authorities must ensure not only in their pronouncements, but also in their dealings with the public and with teachers that professional issues rather than administrative convenience is the main priority in the promotion of education in the community. To this end it is felt that a matter of priority both for employing authorities and for a new Teachers' Council is the establishment of respected professional public relations contacts with the community and with the news media. In this field aso it is important that employing authorities establish sound public relations with their professional employees. This is important at all levels of service but perhaps never more so than in the probationary period of a teachers' service.

The second main area in which action should be taken can be classified as changes within the teaching service itself. Firstly, in respect of training for the profession, students of promising academic and personality potential should not be unduly discouraged by the fear of inability to succeed in training for the profession. In this regard training institutions should examine carefully their failure rates in a critical assessment of what effect these are having in the overall provision of education in South Africa. Under this heading must also come the demonstration that there is a career for English-speaking entrants to the profession beyond the level of inspector of education or headmaster. In a comprehensive review of post-initial training more emphasis should be given to the training of suitable candidates for promotion to higher grade posts. It is the view of the writer that

this training should not only be given within the headquarters of employing authorities, but that other institutions such as the universities and the new colleges of further training should be called upon to contribute. It would seem appropriate that thought should be given to the institution of a Diploma of Educational Administration and/or a Bachelor of Education degree with Educational Administration as a major study. A third point to be considered under this heading is the realisation both by society and by the employing authorities of the changing role of the teacher in the community in the last quarter of the twentieth century. The situation is well expressed by McMullen:

> "The image that the teacher of the past had of himself was that of a highly responsible figure at the centre of the stage, giving academic, social and moral instruction to children; a man isolated from his professional colleagues, inferior to his professional hierarchy, apart from parents and the local society which embraces children. In the future it should be more, perhaps, of a man leading individual children through learning — academic, moral and social — situations, part of a team of professionals, a colleague of the hierarchy, and part of a partnership with parents and society, with whom he identifies, in the education process." [13]

Such a change in roles can involve frustration, insecurity and recrimination before it is successfully achieved.

Finally, in this section must be included the recognition of the role of the married woman teacher and the according to her of appropriate professional and financial recognition.

The last main area for action in dealing with the present crisis of teacher supply lies in the recruitment of teachers from abroad. In the last few years it has become apparent that there is an oversupply of teachers in the English-speaking countries of the Northern Hemisphere. At the present time we are told that there is a surplus of some seven thousand teachers in England and Wales.[14] In the past, attempts to recruit teachers from overseas have met with limited success. The present crisis, however, appears to justify a further attempt being made to obtain suitable recruits from abroad. It is realised that for various reasons redundant teachers are not necessarily likely to be of the highest calibre, but there is no doubt that selected teachers from this group could be of tremendous assistance in this country at the present time. Consideration should be given to the recruitment of this teachers on a three-year contract, this constituting a probationary period after which more permanent employment should be offered to satisfactory teachers who wished to remain in South Africa.

A number of suggestions have been made regarding the stimulation of recruiting to the teaching profession. In the crisis of supply it must be realised that all these and other avenues should be dealt with on a consolidated basis. The problem will not be overcome on a piecemeal patchwork basis; it must be recognised for what it is; a national crisis involving concerted measures by all concerned in its resolution.

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