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METRO AND AREA BOARDS OF EDUCATION:
BUDGET CEILINGS FRACTURE A FRAGILE COMPROMISE

INTRODUCTION:

On October 19, 1973, the Bureau was asked by the "Ministerial Commission on the Organization and Financing of the Public and Secondary School Systems in Metropolitan Toronto", to respond to its terms of reference.

The Bureau welcomed this opportunity to review current and continuing problems facing education generally, and those in the Metro system specifically. Within the constraints imposed by the submission deadline (we were asked to respond by the first week of December) intensive primary research was precluded. However, we were able to review studies completed to date, policies which have been adopted, as well as call on past staff experience.

Our presentation concentrated on the partial consensus that emerged from the briefs submitted and on our own evaluation of the problems facing education. Juxtapositioning the consensus with known and implicit Provincial policies, we then attempted to delineate some common ground between them. Concluding that the tension between the School Board and the area Boards of Education was a result not so much of their inherent distributional problems, but a function of Provincial ceilings,¹ we advocated little structural reform. Moreover, having reached the inescapable conclusion that at least the form of Provincial budgetary control was inexpedient, we could not but recommend the adoption of a more flexible approach to trimming educational expenditure.

1. In 1971, the Minister of Education imposed per pupil limitations on educational expenditures.

I.
THE CONSENSUS

There appears, in the briefs thus far submitted to the Lowes Commission, to be widespread agreement on the following points:

A. (i) In theory and, before 1971, in practice, the two-tier system is good. (ii) As a corollary to this, it is argued that Provincial ceilings have damaged the aura of cooperation that pervaded the federation prior to their imposition;

B. The two regional offices that serve Metro are redundant and, therefore, costly;

C. The role of Metro as "equalizer" is a vital one;

D. (i) Further erosion of local board autonomy should be opposed.

(ii) Some responsibility should, in fact, be returned to them. (Varies anywhere from pre 1971 conditions to total local autonomy);

E. The application of the ceilings has had a drastic and deleterious effect on the quality of education in Metro. (While the direct impact of ceilings on quality may be challenged certainly the effect on morale and thus quality can not be denied);

F. Metro, because of the special problems incident to any metropolis, should be granted some kind of "special status" (Direct contact with Minister of Education without regional overseeing and/or financial assistance);

G. (i) A qualified acceptance of the need for some "belt-tightening".

(ii) But budget restraint should not hit "vital" teaching areas.

(iii) An implicit assumption that, in fact, education may need more not less funding to solve the "quality" and "equality" twin crises.

I.
The consensus was drawn from the briefs submitted by the following groups: Metro School Board; Board of Education, (cont'd. p. 3)

A CASE AGAINST CEILINGS

While we sincerely appreciate the need for fiscal responsibility in education we do not believe that restraints such as arbitrary budget ceilings represent a reasonable approach to this goal. Ceilings should be accompanied both by Provincial guidelines for reductions and by a rationale for ceilings including the projected impact on the quality of education. Any such projections and statements would, however, presuppose an existing accurate measure of the effectiveness of our educational system as it now exists. This, to the best of our knowledge is not available.

Therefore, as an apparent first step towards a total Provincial takeover of education, financial ceilings offer a poor beginning and leave little hope that an innovative educational system will be forthcoming.

The logic of an educational system demands, because the process of enlightenment demands, progression. Education is costly because the battles are large and the attrition rate too high. It will continue to be costly as more and better equipment is brought to bear and the attrition rate falls; not attrition in the prosaic terms of failure rates but in loss of human potential, in drug abuse, in alcoholism, in lack of respect for self, others and environment.

(cont'd from p. 2) Borough of Etobicoke; Board of Education Borough of York; Board of Education, Borough of Scarborough; Board of Education, Borough of North York; Board of Education, City of Toronto; Ontario Teachers' Federation; Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation; Toronto Teachers' Federation; Ontario Public School Men's Teachers' Federation.

In a democracy is education particularly crucial -- and expensive. We require of our system not only to teach facts but to make "citizens" in the classical sense. The citizen is an enlightened individual aware of the serious nature of his duties and aware that his actions have broad societal repercussions.

It is only as the individual becomes able to separate his own values from those of the group that he is able to dissent. And it should be added that when the individual finds his own values in agreement with those of his group, his conformity will then carry with it a higher degree of commitment to the group's goals. Social pluralism, and in a very direct way democracy itself, are dependent upon individuals who are engaged in the search for identity. When this search is ignored by society, the monolithic state becomes a reality that, in turn, oppresses those who undertake the search.

The educational system is in a unique position to accomplish the goal of an enlightened citizenry. We cannot hope to achieve our collective ends by crippling its capacity to do its task.

A CASE FOR CEILINGS

On the other side of the issue, the Province's case can be summed up, at the risk of oversimplifying it, as the desire to trim inflated education spending. There is not, it argues, unlimited funding available for education. The Province has new demands on its resources that must be met. "The people", it suggests, dictate the ceilings by their insistence that the quality of education is not worth the dollars pumped into it. Ergo, the ceilings stand.

I.
C. A. Bowers et al, Education and Social Policy: Local Control of Education, New York: Random House, 1970, p.9.

At first glance it seems that the two positions are utterly irreconcilable. Yet, is the Province as intransigent as the briefs would have us believe? While the imposition of the ceilings appears to have been a rather arbitrary act, there is an expressed desire on the part of the Province,

- 1) to improve consultative procedures
- 2) to decentralize Queen's Park decision-making, and
- 3) to aid municipalities more directly (which because education consumes approximately 60% of municipal revenue, brings indirect aid to education.

It makes no sense to charge the Province with the desire to destroy education in Metro. It is, after all, devoting large sums of money to educational research - (OISE has come under serious attack in the past but its current study schedule would appear to be highly relevant to Metro educational problems.¹)

Recent events have shown the hollowness of the indictment of the government for insensitivity to the counsel of others. Witness the projected consolidation of the two regional offices serving Metro, apparently resulting in a substantial savings by streamlining the costly communications interface.² Another example is the proposed reintroduction³, HSI to the contrary, of core subjects: In the light

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For example, some titles are:

- A. Alternative Educational Futures
- B. Directory of Alternative Education in Canada
- C. Patterns of Inquiry

2.

The Hon. Thomas Wells quoted in the Toronto Star November 15, 1973.

3.

The Hon. Thomas Wells quoted in the Globe and Mail November 16, 1973

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development and financing responsibility.

QUESTIONING OUR PRIORITIES

There is a continuing need to question where our educational system is taking us and there is serious doubt as to the ability of our society to endure in the face of apparent misdirection. Some questions which come to mind about our educational system and its priorities are as follows:

Decision-Making

1. Who controls and who pays is the basic question. Can the Province absorb more of the financial burden and still allow major control of policy development to rest with local boards of education?
2. While commissions have made a wide range of recommendations on educational policy, why were none of these utilized as guidelines in the establishing of budget ceilings? 1.
3. Does the over centralization of educational policy-making, with its dubious possibility of increased cost-effectiveness, carry with it a high probability of decreased flexibility and variety, factors more crucial to the achievement of a sound educational system?

Financing

1. Has the Province taken a serious look at making the real estate tax less regressive (e.g. by taxing land more heavily than improvements)?
2. Do the current weighting factors include cost of living differences between areas within the Province as well as municipal tax overburden? 2.
3. With so many problems in making the real estate tax fair, has the Province given adequate consideration to shifting the entire burden of financing education to some other form of taxation?

Teachers

1. Is it enough to require all new teachers to have B.A.s or should all existing teachers be required to upgrade their skills in some manner?
2. Is it unreasonable to expect some measure of the product of our school systems? (Everyone must be responsible to someone other than

1. For example, The Reville Report. Ontario, Select Committee on the Utilization of Educational Facilities, Interim Report. Ontario, Committee on the Costs of Education, Three Interim Reports.
2. Comparing the cost of providing municipal and social services to large urban areas versus rural and suburban communities, in accordance with the communities' general ability to pay.

himself or he will surely seek his own level of incompetence).

3) If a sophisticated merit plan is not attainable, can we ask teachers to submit voluntarily to critiques by groups of fellow teachers, parents, students and administrators?

4) Should teachers and professors be required to work every fifth year outside of education in order to strengthen ties with the non-academic community? As a corollary, should all parents be subject to compulsory education duty similar to trial duty where one fifth of all parents would spend one or two weeks per year acting as teachers' aids and reacting in report form on their observations?

Goals of Education

1) Is it possible to establish some understandable, definitive and accomplishable goals for our educational system along with a timetable and a workable system for monitoring the success of such a program?

2) Is there a responsibility in the private sector to more accurately identify its future requirements for employees and should it, in concert with our educational system, develop an acceptable method of meeting these requirements?

3) If the students for whom education is intended, were able to sit down with teachers, parents, and administrators to make up a set of rules governing school activities would they be a better set of rules than is now in existence and would they be more adhered to?

IN CONCLUSION, those responsible for shaping the destiny of our educational system seem overly involved in trying to develop the perfect system. By addressing themselves simultaneously to so many factors of the many-sided education problem, they are minimizing the impact which they could have if these efforts were more properly directed. By identifying on a priority basis the major problems or areas of concern, they can insure not only that there will be an increased potential for bringing about desired change but also that the changes will be recognizable and measurable. In our opinion, the four most critical areas

of concern are as follows:

1. Quality of Teachers
2. Goals of Education
3. Decision Making
4. Financing.

Quality of Teachers - stricter requirements to become a teacher, continuing education, evaluation and critique of technique by peers and higher salaries for those who become quality teachers is the number one way of improving education.

Goals - along with the lofty philosophical goals of building an enlightened society and strong individual identity, let's determine how much Math, English, History and Science can be squeezed in and get on with teaching it.

Decision Making - the ultimate responsibility for the development of our educational system must rest primarily with one recognizable body. It's either going to be the province of the local school boards who call the shots and while we feel the government closest to the people could do the better job, a decision one way or the other would help to clear up a lot of problems.

Financing - if the three previous matters are attended to, financing will not be a problem beyond determining which tax can most equitably do the job and how the revenue can be fairly distributed.

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