

Letters from Abroad

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Replanning Teacher Education in Victoria

❑ No, the problem is *not* uniquely American! This will certainly be your thought as you read Leonard J. Pryor's description of the teacher shortage in Victoria, Australia, and efforts to alleviate it. Mr. Pryor, at present a member of the Education Department in Victoria, was formerly a member of the staff of Melbourne Teachers College in Victoria. He was a participant in UNESCO's seminar on teacher education in 1948 and a Carnegie Fellow at the Institute of Education in London during 1947-48.—GHF.

ESSENTIAL PROGRESS in education is usually slow, and maybe it is best that it should be so. But when one looks back over the years one is shocked by the waste and outright loss. Although Australian education has much to its credit during the present century, we have realized, especially in Victoria, that the depression and the war have slowed up the rate of progress during the last twenty years. During the depression of the early '30's we closed down two out of three teachers colleges, abandoned certain courses of training, reduced the number of students in training, and indulged in various staffing economies. The losses of the depression years had not been made up by 1939 when World War II arrived to divert many teachers and potential teachers to numerous other forms of essential national service.

Since 1945 we have tried to reduce our losses and to estimate our future needs, but it was not until this year that the Victoria Education Department instituted an overall investigation into the supply and training of teachers as a prelude to reorganization. The first fact revealed was that the school population in Victoria will rise from 315,000 in 1950 to 460,000 in 1960.

This sharp rise in school population is due primarily to the increased birth rate. We have also found that more and more children are remaining in school each year to obtain further secondary education. This development reflects the relative prosperity of the post-war years and the growing belief in education.

The figures given above make no provision for additions to the school population as a result of immigration, and immigration into Australia is now reaching flood-like proportions! Several years ago the Victorian Parliament approved legislation to raise the school-leaving age to fifteen years, but that law has not yet been implemented as it is believed that the 10,000 to 12,000 children who would thus be forced into the schools would prove an embarrassment at this stage. But we mean to make fifteen years a reality, just as we mean to reduce the class size and to extend our special educational services.

More and Better Teachers Needed

The implications of the situation just sketched are clear. Victoria needs urgently more schools or more classrooms in existing schools, and MORE teachers—and better teachers! Both these problems are being attacked with vigor.

It is estimated that in order to provide the necessary teaching personnel, Victoria should be able to put into its schools in 1950 more than 800 newly qualified teachers. By 1955 the output must be at least 1,350, and it is probable that the demand for trained teachers will exceed 1,750 each year as we approach 1960. And the present annual "intake" of recruits to the Victorian Education Department is below 800! If the annual needs are to be satisfied, the recruitment program must be several

years ahead of the actual training program, for the preparation of a teacher may take up to six years. There must, unfortunately, be a lag. No plan devised in 1949 will give us trained teachers in 1950.

An examination of the sources of supply revealed that Victoria is facing a predicament common to most countries. The pool of young people from which we would normally recruit our future teachers is a very small one. We are, in fact, seeking our young teachers from the generation born during the early '30's—and it is alarming to discover how few teachers were born then. This difficulty is accentuated by the further fact that the present period of post-war prosperity, expansion, and inflation is characterized by a widespread call for labor, for adolescents as well as adults, to serve in every conceivable field of private and public enterprise.

Locating the Personnel

Although we doubt whether all the teachers we want really exist, we know that many young people are drifting out of schools without being interested in higher education and in teaching as a career. To help and encourage pupils to prolong their secondary school education we are offering 500 teaching bursaries for 1950—400 for pupils to undertake the fifth year of secondary education and 100 for pupils to complete the sixth (matriculation) year. We shall expect these pupils to enter the service of the Education Department. Secondary education is free in any case, but the bursary will entitle the holder to a maintenance allowance of 50 pounds¹ per annum and to preference in selection for appointment to the Department.

A recruiting officer has been assigned the task of visiting secondary schools throughout the State to interest children

in teaching, to describe the qualifications required, and to advise them on the various avenues of employment offered in teaching. Armed with films and publicity literature, he has already publicized our needs and signed up hundreds of potential teachers.

A special effort has also been made to recruit trained teachers in Great Britain. Although Australia has received thousands of migrants, few of them are trained teachers. A more useful experiment is the recruitment in England and Scotland of 100 ex-servicemen, who will be trained as primary teachers. Of these 100, fifty have already arrived in Victoria and are living in hostels in Geelong, where a new teachers college will open in 1950.

New Education for New Teachers

It is proposed to abandon the student teacher system by which all intending teachers have been required to have pre-training experience in schools. This system has certain advantages but, like most countries which have tried the system, Victoria has found that it has not usually worked satisfactorily, and that too many young teachers have been obliged to accept responsibilities for which they are not yet ready. This system is destined to disappear before 1955; it will serve as a means of entry to the profession for the time being for young people not old enough for training. This will have a recruiting value—but little else.

All teacher training courses are now being overhauled. For many years Victoria has had an indefensible one-year course of training for primary teachers. The shortage of teachers and lack of accommodation have led to the survival of this course in spite of general dissatisfaction with such a meagre preparation for teaching. It is hoped to introduce a minimum course of two years' training for primary

¹ I've quoted some figures for allowance in Australian pounds. To convert them to dollars under ruling exchange rates may give an erroneous impression. The purchasing power of an Australian pound in Australia may give the best basis of comparison. For example, an Aussie pound would buy in Australia nearly twelve pounds of butter or fifty-four pounds of sugar or forty-eight grapefruit. One pound would not be quite enough to buy two pairs of nylons, but it would buy one good quality shoe (and half of a very good quality shoe).

teachers in 1951, and a special committee has been assigned the task of drafting a course which will be in line with the best modern educational practices. Specialist courses for teachers of infants and handicapped children, and for teachers of speech, art, crafts, home science, and physical education are under review.

The training of secondary teachers of general subjects has virtually been in abeyance for fifteen years but, beginning in 1950, secondary studentships will be offered to highly qualified pupils from secondary schools to take up courses at the University of Melbourne. They will be assisted to study for one of the following degrees: Arts, Science, Commerce, Music, Agricultural Science, or Engineering. They will be required to follow the degree course (three or four years) with a one-year course of professional training, with the first year of the course for the degree of Bachelor of Education.

Holders of secondary studentships will enjoy privileges available to all other students in training as teachers; they will receive free tuition and be granted allowances ranging from 169 pounds the first year to 195 pounds in the fourth or fifth year. Students who have to live away from home (fifty-five percent of all students) receive an additional twenty-six pounds. These secondary studentships in particular will be awards of outstanding value, and it is anticipated that there will be no dearth of well-qualified applicants for the 265 places which will be offered

in 1950 to young people who qualify for matriculation in 1949 or who are already at the University.

The plans for 1950 envisage some 1,450 young people in training as teachers for the service of the Education Department of Victoria, an increase of nearly fifty percent on the figure for 1949. This expanding plan of training poses an embarrassing accommodation problem. Plans are being prepared for three new provincial teachers colleges, each of which will cost over 250,000 pounds; but in view of the housing shortage and the scarcity of labor and materials, these colleges will not be available for several years. So training must be carried on in temporary quarters and under unfavorable conditions. Former army huts, imported prefabricated, aluminum, or steel classrooms, and sections of existing schools are being pressed into service. And large old mansion houses are being purchased to provide residential facilities for students whose homes are in rural areas.

Teacher education in Victoria is entering on a five- or six-year program of expansion and reform with high hopes and few advantages, except the backing of an efficient administrative system, the enthusiasm of its planners, the financial support of the government, and the example of much splendid work by the teachers of the past, most of whom gave outstanding service in the remote but important rural areas of the State.

Leonard J. Pryor

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6. Political activity is one of the noblest expressions of democratic citizenship. School people should become participants in those appropriate activities incident to resolving public issues and choosing public officials. Helping to elect and to in-

form competent legislators is the most effective way of securing favorable consideration for necessary school legislation. —James Pelley, Associate Superintendent of Schools, Lincoln, Nebraska (written for the ASCD Legislative Committee).

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