

The problem, of course, is not confined to New Zealand. It is common to all those countries that are trying to make democracy work by giving more and more education to their people. New Zealand stands well up in the vanguard of this movement, although some of the wealthier of the American States have gone further than we have. Great Britain and France have been a little more tardy, but both are now reorganizing their school systems on the basis of giving secondary education of some kind to the whole population. The interesting thing is that most of the countries concerned are seeking the solution to their troubles in very much the same way as New Zealand, with a "common core" of subjects for all children and a widely varied range of optional subjects to cater for the multifarious needs and abilities of the new secondary school population.

One of the greatest difficulties everywhere has been to prevent the newer and more practical courses from being regarded as merely inferior variants of the "real" secondary education given to the academically-minded few. New Zealand and the United States have tried to meet the situation by giving all kinds of post-primary education, academic and practical, in the one type of school, except, in the case of New Zealand, of a few of the larger technical schools. Great Britain, on the other hand, has followed a policy of rigid selection within the post-primary system. Some 10 or 15 per cent. of the brightest children are "creamed off" for academic grammar schools by examination at the age of eleven, another small percentage are similarly selected for technical schools, and the remaining children are catered for in "modern secondary schools" with a fairly practical curriculum. This enables the authorities to concentrate in the grammar schools on the academic standards of a comparatively uniform group of bright pupils. But it does create social distinctions which are proving very hard to eradicate. I feel that the average New Zealand parent, with some thirty years tradition of free choice of secondary school behind him would not easily come to tolerate the arbitrary drafting of his child to one type of school or another at the age of eleven.

I respect this attitude and find myself in full agreement with it, but it must be recognized that this policy, which has been steadily developing in New Zealand from the beginning of the century, has had a definite effect on average standards of work in the post-primary schools. In 1917, as we have seen, only 37 per cent. of primary-school leavers went on to post-primary school, and they were, with a few exceptions, the academically brightest children in the primary schools. The strictly average pupil did not then get beyond Form II (or, as it was called, Standard 6). Now, when 85 per cent. go on, and when the school leaving age is fifteen, it is only the very dullest pupils, with very rare exceptions, who do not go beyond Form II, and the child of strictly average ability will be found in Form III or Form IV. The lower end of Form III will be found to contain children who, earlier in the century, would never have gone beyond Standard 4 or 5.

It is quite inevitable, therefore, that the *average* level of achievement in English and arithmetic in Form III should be lower now than it was thirty, or even ten, years ago. No matter how efficient the teaching, the pupils at the lower end of the class are just the same kind of human material that they would have been had they remained in standards 4 or 5. Their education up to the age of fifteen in practical subjects and in social attitudes can be readily justified, and their further schooling in English and arithmetic is necessary, but it is just in such skills as spelling and arithmetic that their basic weakness continues to show most clearly. The pupils at the top end of Form III, of course, should be as bright as ever they were, and their academic standards should remain high, although it must be admitted that, in a small school that does not permit of adequate classification by ability, the "tail" of poorer pupils may tend to retard the rest a little. If we had, like Great Britain, separate post-primary schools for the academically duller pupils, the situation would be easier to see and control, but New Zealand has for forty years followed a different policy, partly because of our more scattered population and partly because of our natural disinclination to segregate social groups.