

9 JUN 1992

Teachers Of English For Schools

Now that as a result of the short-sighted decision by the universities to eliminate English as a compulsory subject at the degree level, it has become well-nigh impossible to have English taught properly in schools, urgent remedial measures need to be taken to improve staffing. It can no longer be denied that the average graduate, who has not studied the subject beyond the HSC examination, is wholly incapable of understanding the Text-books prescribed for the upper levels of the school, far less of teaching them. But where are the schools to recruit their teachers from? The salary-scale, though much higher than is the past, would not attract people with the Master's degree in English, or even graduates who have majored in English as their honours subject.

We think the only sensible course open to the country is to organise in-service training courses for teachers who are expected to teach English. This is a matter of such paramount importance that it is far more urgent than nationalising more schools and colleges as the government plans to do. We do not see much point in the government's assuming more direct responsibility for running the educational institutions if it means only increasing the number of untrained teachers paid from state funds.

We also believe that private initiative can play a useful role in the matter. If private coaching classes for students preparing for public examinations makes sense, much greater is the need for remedial English for teachers. The directorate of public instruction should encourage such private initiatives, if they are well-meant and not merely one more proposition to turn the situation to commercial account, by offering help. The problem has grown so unwieldy that unless it is tackled on a national basis, with all sectors cooperating, our school system will degenerate into a meaningless show, and we shall have only the satisfaction of turning out every year an endless streams of ill-educated people claiming jobs beyond their competence.

In five years time from now, we shall have lost all hope of being able to do anything about it. It is already late, but a start can be made right now to stop the rot.

1st Editorial, Observer June 8, Para 1, Line 4, Please read 'deed' 'for dead'.