

More About The Text-books

The decision of the National Curriculum and Text-book Board to appoint a committee to revise English For Today Book Eight is the first sign of their response to the criticism directed against it but it does not go far enough. The Board seem still to cling to the illusion that a book which has been shown to be an outrage against all accepted notions of idiomatic accuracy in English could possibly be turned into something better by revision; it needs to be thrown out lock, stock, and barrel, and immediately replaced by a publication which will enable students to read authentic English writing by standard authors. This is the main point upon which we have harped repeatedly, and, as our correspondence columns have shown, this view is shared by many.

We do not know at this stage what the terms of reference of the proposed committee would be. We hope they would not limit their attention to a single book but examine the whole question of academic standards of teaching of English as well as other subjects. What is in doubt today is the usefulness of an official Board which by monopolising the publication of text-books has sealed the chances of progressive improvement that free competition promises. The enormous outlay that text-book publication by government involves must be carefully weighed against the evils it has spawned, the worst of which is indifference to standards because of the absence of any threat of rejection.

To think that English For Today is the only book which has been found wanting would be entirely wrong. We have seen criticisms even of books in other subjects such as Bengali or Geography which, to judge by the examples quoted in the press, abound in equally outrageous errors. To foist upon children clumsily written books bristling with mistakes, and to imagine that savings in foreign exchange compensate for their deficiencies betray an outlook which is wholly indefensible.

Not only has the quality of the Text-book Boards publication been criticised; they appear also to have failed to ensure their distribution in the manner government desires. Books which are meant to be given free to children seldom reach them in time; they have to be acquired by way of the black market where the parents are forced to obtain the officially banned key-books at fantastic cost. And here again lack of competition has resulted in a marked and increasing deterioration of quality. We welcome the news that government propose to spend several million taka on education in the next few years, but this expenditure would have little effect unless the quality of text-books improves dramatically.