

Double Shift In Schools And Colleges

One of the solutions sometimes adopted in private educational institutions, when they wish to take in more students than can be accommodated in the existing class-rooms, is to introduce a second afternoon shift or an evening shift. A fresh batch of teachers take over at the end of the first shift, but occasionally for the sake of extra pay some teachers from one shift volunteer to teach in the other.

A recent announcement from the Ministry of Education indicated that the government proposed to opt for the same solution with a view to providing for the education of a larger number than could be handled under the existing arrangements.

There should be no objection, provided extra teachers could be found. But nothing has been said about how to recruit more teachers. The existing vacancies in schools and colleges have for months remained an unsolvable problems owing to a grave shortage of teaching staff. What then can second shifts mean?

The offer of some extra emoluments may tempt some teachers to undertake extra duties, but we are afraid that the quality of education will suffer drastically, when instruction is expected from men and women putting in ten or twelve hours of labour a day.

We have been pressing for months for a massive programme of teacher-training, the improvement of teachers' pay-scales and working conditions in order to attract better talent to the teaching profession. Of this we have heard nothing.

The platitude that teaching is an idealistic profession and that good teachers must be prepared to think more of the nobility of their task than of what they are paid, no longer carries conviction. The fact is, the gap between teaching and other professions in respect of earnings has so widened that young people seldom consider joining a school or college except as a last resort. Campus violence in recent years has also made teaching a risky job.

What we would like to emphasise is that the opening of a second shift in schools and colleges should not be viewed as the perfect solution of our educational crisis. The country must take steps to recruit more and better teachers at the same time that more schools and colleges are established or more students are admitted to them. The two must go together.