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A Question Of Text-books

It was announced sometime ago that private English-medium schools would not be allowed in future to adopt whatever text-books they themselves considered suitable but must prescribe material approved by the national Text-Book Board. The reason given was that these institutions were seen using books whose contents were not compatible with our values or culture, and that the freedom with which they have hitherto been using text-books as they liked has had an undesirable effect on pupils minds.

No details were provided. It is not consequently possible to understand the background of the announcement, or to form an exact idea of the kind of cultural erosion which the Text-Book Board has decided to check. Their decision seems unexceptionable in the abstract, for no society can let its youth be exposed to cultural subversion.

But we think a valid distinction can and should be drawn between a national curriculum which should apply to all educational institutions in the country and individual text-books. A national curriculum identifies the areas within which instruction should be imparted and defines the subjects of which all pupils must acquire a knowledge.

But this is not the same thing as foreign private institutions to limit their adoptions to the Text-Book Board's publications. There are three strong reasons for this. First, the *raison d'être* of private institutions is the feeling among many—a feeling which the state does not consider unreasonable—that there does exist scope for private enterprise in the educational field. There is a demand for the kind of education English medium schools provide; this is perceived to fill a vacuum, to supply a need. The fact that private schools have not been banned is clear recognition of this truth by the authorities.

Secondly, to compel private English medium schools to teach the Text-Book Board's publications is to render their whole existence nugatory. The strait-jacket of uniformity in respect of text-books would abolish the distinction between English medium and non-English medium institutions.

Thirdly, most important, most of the Board's publications are, recognisably, so flawed as to make a correct education for our children next to impossible. We earnestly hope the announcement would be withdrawn or modified.