

Creating a New Society

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Recent interaction with some primary school pupils forced me to reflect on whether as a people we are unwittingly destroying or weakening the fibre of our nation. On assigning these pupils simple tasks (language items, meaning of proverbs, synonyms, and so on), I encountered a tidal wave of complaints. Every exercise was too much work. None of them wanted to take time to think and produce excellence. Everybody simply wanted to complete what they had to do as quickly as possible with minimum effort, but with the expectation of great success. Most students complained that they do not really like school; that their parents are the ones who insist that they go to school and take lessons. Others wanted to talk about the parties they had attended and the ones they were looking forward to. Few seemed to have seriously considered current events in our society, when prompted. What was even more alarming is the fact that these students represented the rainbow structure of our society. They were not from any particular segment.

This experience raised many questions for me, among the most pressing and prominent of which are:

1. How have we been using our education system as a mechanism for developing a democratic, caring, ethical, and multicultural society?
2. Has our government recognized the social ills that need to be addressed, and which demand that we develop a purposeful ideology for present and future generations?
3. How can we ensure effective parenting in our society? Is it possible to use our schools at night and weekends to introduce, promote, and institutionalise a programme to achieve this?
4. Who or what agency or institution has taken the necessary steps to form a grand alliance among such institutions as the home, the school, the media, and the arts to ensure that we develop a Trinidad and Tobago way of life which stands unique on the global landscape, and which is strong enough to resist the negatives of cultural imperialism?

These questions may sound naïve, but many innovations and social successes in history emerged because of the determination to realise visions. I need only refer to man's exploration of space or Dick Tracy's radio watch. Yesterday's science fiction has become today's reality.

Looking at our education system—from primary to tertiary level—we need to question the major objectives of education in Trinidad and Tobago: Are we preparing primary school pupils only to pass the SEA examinations, secondary students for success in their CXC examinations and to win scholarships, and university students to obtain degrees so that they can obtain a job to enjoy the good life?

In developing our human resource, it seems to me that we have to move away from the elitist education system that continues to constrain our thrust towards human development. We have to start paying more attention to how we can develop the

character and emotions of our citizens. We have to find ways and means for cultivating in our people qualities characterised by a high work ethic, patriotism, and a propensity to render service wherever we may find ourselves.

Indeed, teacher education in Trinidad and Tobago must now focus on how to produce teachers who are committed and equipped to create and sustain school cultures from which a new breed of graduate will emerge. If 2020 vision is to be realised, we must have the necessary human resources.

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