

Bjorn Grage
Former student,
College of Further
Education. Present Student
of Photography with
philosophic interests.

As a student I made some first hand experiences in the educational system of England. In it I found many reasons for criticism and much room for improvement.

The most upsetting features of the system to my mind are its high resemblance with a factory, the undesirable nature of the examination system as well as the rigidity of the whole apparatus. When I use the metaphor of a factory for the educational system that is by no means exaggeration. The problem here, as in the systems of other industrial nations, is its functionalistic background. The main concern of the British educational system does not appear to be the good education of individuals, but much more the production of a maximum of people with an optimum of knowledge required to carry out a specific job, a process comparable with programming a computer or the assemblance of a car in a factory. Collectively this mechanism is supposed to drive the economy of the nation, and indeed, education seems to serve this purpose well, but it does so at the expense of the individual students, i.e. children and young people are commercially exploited, something which in my eyes is untenable!

The function of education really should benefit the individual on an absolute level and not only secure a financially successful future.

This means there should be a range of options provided which enable the student to enjoy an education which will prove useful to the students after leaving the system and it also should be intellectually stimulating, carefully adjusted to the individual's ability.

In other words there should be a sound, all round education with a variable balance of practical and academic skills, the overall effect should be something from which the individual can benefit in his life, a sound base which enables the student to manage a bank account as well as to solve basic interhuman problems. This education should never be regarded as 'complete', but it much rather should provide valuable stimuli which can be further developed after leaving the educational system.

This is a vital component of a good education which seems to be non-existent at present, in my experience I found that students attend courses either to achieve a career or to bridge the gap between public house and bed. Hardly ever does the education they enjoy (or, more to the point, suffer) correspond with their real interests. At the moment encouragement or creation of interests or even general awareness is non-existent, this is extremely depressing and in the anyway dull life it results in creating a dominating anti-intellectual and apathetic atmosphere, which somehow leads mottoes like, "Non scolae, sed vitae discimus" ad absurdum.

In the whole situation of a useless and dull college life the form of the examinations by the universities do hardly help. In the process of these few hours of exams, students are supposed to put something on paper which is intended to reflect their knowledge of a subject they studied in years. This seems unfair to many students and their argument is that two years of work mustn't depend on a few hours of examinations. Through my own experience I know that it is very unsatisfying to sit in an exam writing a one-hour essay on a subject one could write a book on, or equally bad to find that one could easily have done with much less work as a short exam couldn't possibly detect deficiencies in knowledge. Moreover many people find it hard to produce anything which reflects their knowledge under the stress of an exam. Something which once the exam is passed is entirely unnecessary anyway, as it is totally unrealistic that one has to produce one's entire knowledge of a subject in hours. Continuous assessment and a series of longer exams as well as project work are surely good improvements.

As the above account illustrates, there is urgent need for a number of reformations in the system to prevent students from suffering disadvantages. However, it also must be mentioned that a student with motivation and specific interests can obtain a fairly satisfactory education. However, such a *rara avis* cannot really feel at home in our present educational system as its atmosphere is hostile to such individuals as it was originally designed to create the human mass product, 'qualified worker'.