

# We Must Find "Quality" And Use It

(The second of a recent series of talks from Station 3AR by J. D. G. MEDLEY, M.A., Vice-Chancellor of Melbourne University)

IN my first talk I tried to set out the thesis that reconstruction on democratic lines is concerned basically with persons and not with machinery. This being so, it is clear that the educator is legitimately concerned with its problems. But it is most important that we should be clear how much he is concerned—the more so as we are starting late and must be selective, if we are to do any good. He cannot do miracles in any case and he has no one panacea for our troubles. Raising the school leaving age, increasing the number and improving the calibre of teachers, revising the curriculum and so on—all these are excellent and essential in their way, but must all be subordinate to a true understanding of their real end. And that, I think, can be simply stated. After this war there will be another war to be fought—the war against the ideas that the Nazi ideology has let loose upon the world and which will not perish with the Nazi armies. That war can be fought in only one way by a democracy with any hope of success—a way which for want for a better name may be described as Quality Control.

## The Search for Quality

To survive as such in the world of the future a democracy can afford to neglect no smallest fragment of quality that may exist in the minds of its citizens. It must be discovered, trained, and used, and in the first two of these activities the educator is most intimately concerned. As regards the meaning of quality there is no need to be more explicit. We all know that there is a grave wastage of it in the community, that children leave school too early in order to satisfy the economic gospel in which they have been nursed, that reinforcements of the right calibre are most urgently needed in the ranks of those who will direct the future of this country. There must be an increasing and an insatiable demand for technical and administrative skills of the highest grade, and they must be supplied if we are to run any chance of emerging safely from the wilderness. Quantity, of course, has its importance; there is much to be done before we can say, for example, that the average elector is capable of exercising his privileges with the maximum of intelligence and the minimum of passion.

But it is even more important to ease his task by bringing it about that issues are presented to him in a way that gives him some chance of understanding them. I am, I suppose, an educated person and I am, I know, talking to educated people, but I admit without shame, and expect you would agree with me, that I found it difficult during the last Federal election to feel that I was a really intelligent citizen. And I do not think that it was entirely my own fault.

This concept of Quality Control will dominate the rest of what I have to say to you, but before I come on to more

general questions I want to intersperse a few remarks on the immediate situation that will confront us as soon as demobilisation begins to loom and reconstruction becomes our main preoccupation. Unless the short-term problems that will arise are solved, we may as well stop thinking and talking now, for we shall, in that case, be at the mercy of uncontrollable events.

## Dislocation Is Inevitable

I make no idle prophecies concerning dates. Demobilisation, when it comes, may be more or less gradual, but it will not, I am sure, be susceptible to very scientific staggering. There have been those who have believed that it will be possible to retain men and women in the services and to organise education for them there until jobs are available in civil life. I do not believe it. I am sure that, whatever the education and the amenities provided, it will not be practicable to prevent them from coming home—A.W.L. and on foot, if necessary. There will be an inevitable dislocation, which you can envisage just as well as I can, and in the interval that must necessarily elapse before many of them can be absorbed there will be a pressure upon educational facilities, the contemplation of which, I admit, makes my blood run cold.

There will, no doubt, be a Public Works programme of housing and delayed construction which will deal with large numbers. The technical schools, whose facilities for training have, of necessity, greatly expanded during the war, will continue their magnificent service to the nation by rehabilitating to their old or to new trades those whose inclinations lie in that direction. The universities will strain their limited resources to the utmost to cope with the inevitable demand for intensive professional training and for intensive refresher courses that must arise. But these resources are limited, and it is to be hoped that in the interest of the individuals concerned, the professions, the university and the Nation—for the universities must be the main ganglion of Quality Control—they will not be taxed to complete exhaustion, and that the numbers of those entering professions will continue as they are now to be subject to a quota based upon the estimated needs of the profession concerned.

## There Will Be Others

But, be all this as it may, there will be a surplus consisting of those who whether for lack of qualifications or lack of accommodation cannot be admitted to immediate training and also of those who, without professional ambitions, are simply waiting for a job—a clerical job for example—that may well not be available until months or even years have elapsed. They will no doubt be in receipt of a subsidy, but that will not solve the problem. What they will need above all else is education of some kind—but in many cases of a particular kind.

(continued on next page)

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