

Private Members' Business. - Junior Certificate Curriculum: Motion.

Wednesday, 29 May 1996

Mr. Sargent: Ba mhaith liom buíochas a ghabháil le mo chomhleacaithe i Fianna Fáil a roinn a gcuid ama liom. Ba mhaith liom chomh maith tacú leis an rún seo. Go bunúsach is rud tábhachtach é go mbeimis ag soiléiriú cad dír each a bhí i gceist ag an Aire Oideachais nuair a labhair sí ar an hábhair atá i gceist anseo.

Ní mór dom a rá chomh maith go bhfuil suim faoi leith agam sa dá ábhar atá i gceist ní amháin gur thaitn siad liom agus mé ar scoil ach creidim go bhfuil siad an-thábhachtach ó thaobh na saorántachta de agus ó thaobh na ndaoine óga atá ag fás suas inniu má tá freagracht le bheith sa saol poiblí agus i saol pearsanta an duine.

I cannot help but feel the Minister in provoking this motion has acted more from an attitude of high handedness than from any sense of malice. That is as fair as I can be to her. I wonder whether in reality she really means to downgrade history and geography. Has she confused the need to provide a relevant modern curriculum giving an impression that she is downgrading history and geography? It seems to be a downgrading on the face of it. Would it have been wiser of the Minister to explain more fully that the changes in education were not replacing history and geography but changing their organisation? Rather than have these subjects form the main organisational bricks of education at second level, we have introduced changes similar to those at primary level. The module idea is more relevant to education nowadays because information technology is more widely available and used increasingly.

It should be stressed that the changes relate to the integration of subjects. The reality is that subjects are integrated by [578] their nature and are not simply information packages. Our approach in the past resulted in exams such as the former intermediate certificate and the leaving certificate which were removed from reality and seemed to be just score cards shown to employers, rather than any true preparation for the life that students may want or need to lead when they leave school.

We should also stress how the changes relate to the view people take of the world. Education should be more global in nature, in light not just of information technology but also of the way in which travel has developed. Instead of that we have been using subjects in school which are very much dominated by a nation state view. This seems to miss many of the relevant changes and details of the world in which we live.

There is no doubt that history has been used and abused in the past and this must be taken into account. When any schoolchild on a tour of this House is shown the picture of Countess Markievicz, it becomes the subject of a debate as to who was the first women elected to the British House of Commons. We talk then about the differences of interpretation between our country's history and another's. History is important to enable us to get to the bottom of many of an scéilíocht a bhaineann le cúrsaí staire go minic.

Geography has also been dominated by a nation state outlook. Friends of mine have said their most memorable experiences of geography involved colouring maps of countries. This seemed to be their main legacy when geography is such a broad subject.

Mr. Power:   Some of them have changed colour.

Mr. Sargent:   Indeed, by the time people finished schooling the information given is no longer correct. Geography cannot be allowed to slip from its place as a core subject. It is [579] important to avoid conflict and differences. It is important that we all understand that we share one earth and that we have a responsibility to look at all parts of the world in the context of an integrated living environment.

It is good and relevant to emphasise civics but it is an empty subject without geography as a cornerstone and history to inform people about the past and the type of future they might wish to avoid.

Tá stair agus tíreolaíocht chomh tábhachtach sin gur chóir don Aire Oideachais a bheith an-soiléir agus a rá go dír each cad tá i gceist ins an Páipéar Bán agus sna Billí Oideachais atá os ár gcomhair.

Tá go leor daoine den tuairim — agus b'fhéidir gur mhíthuiscint é — go bhfuil neamhaird á dhéanamh ag an Aire de thuairimí na múinteoirí agus an phobail i gcoitinne.

Creideann siad go gceapann sise go bhfuil fhios aici go pearsanta ina croí istigh cad tá ag teastáil agus go bhfuil a tuairim féin níos fearr ná tuairim aon duine eile. Ní dóigh liom go bhfuil sin daonlathach nó go bhfuil sé ceart. Ba chóir don Aire éisteacht leis an bpobal agus gníomhú dá réir. Faoi láthair tá go leor daoine ana-mhí-shásta leis an Aire seo. Ní maith liom é sin a rá faoi éinne ach is fearr é a rá anseo ná taobh amuigh den áit seo. Is féidir leis an Aire rud éigin a dhéanamh faoi. Tá mé ag iarraidh uirthi an seans sin a thógaint agus gan ísliú céime a thabhairt don stair nó don tíreolas.