

Book Reviews

Richard Joly
NOTRE DEMOCRATIE D'IGNORANTS INSTRUITS.
Ottawa: Les Editions Leméac Inc., 1981.
239 pp.

Richard Joly addresses the question, "In what ways may we best prepare our young people to fulfil their obligations and responsibilities as members of a democracy?" This question is a basic one which all concerned with education, and especially those with political education, must try to answer.

According to Professor Joly, the traditional assumptions on which we tend to operate are these: in a democracy we need an informed electorate, one that knows about government at all levels, what the principal issues of our day are, and how government works; the object for each member is to acquire knowledge for intelligent political decision-making; progress in a democracy, it has been asserted, is in proportion to the instruction of its citizens.

The author challenges this view. He argues forcibly that people today, even those who are highly educated, lack expertise in affairs vital to our country. By and large, we are all savants zébrés d'ignorance. How much do our plumbers, surgeons, air traffic controllers, clergy, or cashiers really know about the Constitution, James Bay, energy pricing, CANDU reactors, NATO, or a host of other issues our politicians deal with? Even some of our lawyers describe certain legislation as "a jungle." Besides, to add to our problems, we are manipulated by governments, private enterprise, and the media. The industry of our government today is as complex as our agricultural or aviation industries, about which most of us are abysmally ignorant. The result, according to Professor Joly, is that understandably we are confused and bewildered by public affairs.

The solution to our dilemma is not to cease attempts to transmit knowledge, but to develop an awareness of our values. The task faced by electors at the polls is to choose candidates who have the same constellation of value as their own: "If you have faith in your messenger, you will have confidence in the message that will be

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transmitted." The establishment of faith between the governed and the governors will revitalize democracy and help all those of us who are striped with ignorance to become genuine democratic citizens.

The author is a persuasive writer. Repeatedly, he calls forward a legion of pertinent examples to support his arguments; he frequently employs thoughtful analogies to elucidate his point of view (in one chapter the complexity of politics is likened to the playing and televising of a game of football); and he writes deftly and with wit (two thirds of the way through the book, the reader is given a chance to quit - dernière sortie avant péage.).

In the opinion of this reviewer, Professor Joly has probably exaggerated the problem of knowledge that confronts us. We acquire much important knowledge directly from personal experience. We are only too acutely aware of the way in which certain matters touch our lives (pollution, gasoline prices, the language of schooling, traffic congestion, violence on T.V., food additives, and so on) and we may be strongly motivated to know more and to urge action. Moreover, while our elected representatives are channels through which we may voice our concerns, we are not limited by any means to using them exclusively. Each of us has numerous routes through which he can, and does, communicate with governments - our local, provincial, and national governments - and non-government organizations. Think of neighbourhood groups, home and school, political party associations, government regional offices, religious institutions, newspapers, professional organizations, unions, and the like. Surely maximizing participation in these many ways is a powerful way of enhancing democratic citizenship?

It is to be regretted that the author has not considered the merits of several existing curriculum projects in political education which constitute alternatives to the traditional, legal-institutional, and historical approach. The political-process, political-concepts, and public-issues approaches have all been inspired, in part, by the problem of the explosion of knowledge. Two publications specifically, A.B. Hodgetts' *Quelle culture? quel héritage?* (1968) and Benoit Robert's *Perspectives nouvelles en enseignement du Canada* (1979) appear to have gone unnoticed, although they, too, grapple with the same fundamental question as does Professor Joly.

In spite of such shortcomings, this is indeed an exciting, analytical, well-documented book, written with verve, conviction and insight. It provides a valuable alternative point of view to existing theories of political education and, as such, it deserves to be read widely by those who study seriously the relationship between democracy and education.

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