

New Opportunities in Secondary Schools

By Hon. John P. Robarts

The new program for Ontario Secondary Schools was discussed at most of the Women's Institute conventions this fall and will be studied further at the Women's Institute Farm Radio Forum meetings on February 5th, 1962. Several women have asked if we could provide an outline of the Government's new plan, so we are happy to publish this statement from the Honourable John P. Robarts, Minister of Education and Premier of Ontario. — Editor.

THE OBJECTIVE of the Ontario secondary schools has always been to give every pupil the maximum education consistent with his capabilities and his willingness to achieve—an education for better living and a preparation to earn a livelihood. Until recently our society was able to absorb into remunerative employment almost every pupil leaving school with or without a graduation diploma. But, now, technological changes have made it impossible for a pupil leaving Grades 9, 10 or 11 without a diploma and without a specific skill, to obtain employment with any degree of security for the future.

Traditionally, the secondary schools have offered one programme of studies in each of the General, Commercial and Technical Courses leading to the Secondary School Graduation Diploma at the end of Grade 12. In the large schools some further classification or streaming has always been possible on the basis of options selected by the pupils. Some school systems are attempting to operate on a double standard at the end of Grade 12—one for diploma purposes and another for admission to Grade 13. For some time, the Department has been fully aware that under the existing programme only 40% of pupils regularly promoted to Grade 9 graduate with a diploma from Grade 12. The present courses of study providing for entrance to universities, institutes of technology, teachers' colleges, and nursing schools appear to be too difficult or unsuitable for many pupils who intend to leave school before completing Grade 12 in order to obtain positions in business and industry. Yet, in any revision of curriculum, our present standards for capable students must be maintained and sufficient challenge to develop the potential of all students must be ensured.

It is the opinion of those concerned with secondary education that our present General Course, and the Commercial and Technical Courses also, cannot fulfil two functions — namely, the preparation for higher education and the training and education of pupils more directly for employment. To meet the need of

this large second group of pupils who drop out before reaching Grade 12, necessary changes will be made in school organization and subject content. Teachers, as well as representatives from all other groups concerned with education, will be consulted. All of the factors which have placed Ontario's school system in the front rank over the years will be preserved and augmented by new opportunities for the advancement of ambitious students.

In developing a revised comprehensive plan for the Province, it must be kept in mind that we now have large high school districts where technical and commercial education has been offered for a number of years. We also have a large number of smaller districts where the schools can now begin to provide these opportunities. Nevertheless, for a number of years, some small secondary schools will be able to offer only the traditional academic course with a limited number of options which lead to higher education. The proposed changes in school organization, therefore, will permit secondary schools of all types and sizes with growing enrolments to operate with a sufficient degree of flexibility within the framework of the plan.

The General, Commercial, and Technical Courses as divisions of the secondary schools are being renamed as Branches: (1) Arts and Science (2) Business and Commerce (3) Engineering, Technology and Trades. A shift in emphasis will be suggested commencing in September, 1962, whereby the more capable pupils from all three Branches of a secondary school, after a Five-Year Programme ending in a common Grade 13, will be encouraged to proceed to higher education. At the same time, the pupils who plan to leave school before Grade 13, or who are unable to cope with Grade 13 subjects, will have better preparation for their life's work by following a new Four-Year Programme which will be developed for each of the Branches named above. This Four-Year Programme will not be restricted by university entrance requirements and as a result will contain a wider choice of practical options in addition to the core of compulsory academic subjects.

To supplement these two Programmes a One (or Two)-Year Programme in occupational subjects will be provided. This limited Programme will be tailored to meet the needs of pupils admitted to secondary schools who have not been regularly promoted from the elementary grades but who must, nevertheless, find a means of earning a living in service trades or occupations.