

GOING TO SCHOOL

1 arrivals and departures

ON HIS ARRIVAL IN DIGBY, Nova Scotia, in the fall of last year, Henry Rucker must have been one of the most enthusiastic immigrants Canada has ever had. He had always been interested in coming to Canada, he says, though he had not often thought of the Maritimes. He accepted a job teaching high school in Digby as a way of getting to Canada, which to him seems to have resembled the Promised Land. He arrived in Digby with enthusiasm for his new job -- teaching social studies at Digby Regional High School -- and for his new home. He soon learned, he says, to love the Fundy Coast and the Maritime style of life he found in Digby, especially that of the fishermen he met and talked with there.

By December, however, Rucker had been fired from his

new job and was locked in a struggle with the tight educational oligarchy which rules Digby's schools -- and much

And by the time the Digby schools closed down for the summer holiday, Rucker had been reinstated by an appeal board. The superintendent of schools, the supervisor, and the principal at DRHS had resigned from their posts. Two of Rucker's supporters on the faculty had not been rehired, the Nova Scotia government had conducted an investigation of the Digby schools and the whole affair had received national publicity. The community of Digby was torn into bitter factions.

By summer, Rucker was in Ottawa, happy in a new job and in his new home, and Digby's reputation as the eastern center for repressive establishmentarianism, oligarchical control and educational Neanderthalism was secure.

But as one long-time observer of the Digby situation commented, "Henry was only a small part of this. What's wrong here was wrong long before he ever came and is still wrong now that he's gone. His case just made it a little more obvious for a while."

What *did* happen in Digby? And what *is* wrong there? And why should the rest of us care?

What's wrong in Digby is the characteristic thing that tends to go wrong in small, relatively isolated, pleasant

IN

DIGBY

and personal communities -- and it tends most frequently to go wrong in the schools.

What happened was that Henry Rucker, a perhaps somewhat abrasive individual with a limited ability to perceive the complexities of interpersonal relationships in a relatively small and ingrown town, arrived at a moment of crisis in the history of the dynasty of F. Courtney Purdy, Superintendent of Schools and president of the Digby General Hospital Board.

2 the stationary

PURDY WAS BORN NEARBY, IN DEEP BROOK. He was educated at Bear River, at Mount Allison University, the University of Michigan, Columbia, and the University of Toronto. When he returned to Nova Scotia he moved up rapidly through the educational hierarchy -- a common enough experience for competent men who are willing to stay in the teaching profession -- and Later he added the office of president of the Digby General Hospital Board, which he has held for twenty years.

Even -- or perhaps especially -- Purdy's enemies concede that he has been admirably effective in both offices. An ingenious and aggressive administrator, he is almost solely responsible for the existence of the Digby General Hospital and for the new, modern wing at the Digby Regional High School. In fact, up until a couple of years ago, Purdy's career was like one of the models educational administrators peddle in their advertising.

Unfortunately, the testimonial dinner to honor him on his retirement, which was held at The Pines in Digby last August 22, was not the unmarked crown of a successful career that it perhaps ought to have been -- and that it probably would have been had the dinner been held August 22, 1968. For one thing, in point of fact Purdy had not retired. For another, hostility toward him in the community had grown to the point where the grumbling about the testimonial dinner must have been nearly audible out at The Pines. Vicious rumours about him were circulating through Digby. Thirteen hundred residents of Digby had signed a petition requesting he be fired.

What had happened to this storybook career? To quote one young resident of Digby, "Well, if Purdy had quit years ago, no one would have ever thought anything much bad about him. But he just waited too long to get out. It's been years since he understood anything about what's really happening in Digby."

3 a private fiefdom

What is really happening in Digby, then? Put sociologically, what's happening is a change in the power structure. The old establishment -- largely an educational establishment, since that seems to be Digby's main industry -- is being challenged by a newer, more broadly-based one. But the old establishment, dominated by F.C. Purdy, has become accustomed to thinking of the hospital

and the high school as essentially its private fiefdom. So that long before Henry Rucker arrived in Digby, there was widespread dissatisfaction with the arbitrariness with which decisions seemed to be made by the school board -- which held its meetings in private and seemed to be accountable to no one.

If you were a citizen of Digby in the middle sixties, you would effectively have had no voice in educational decisions whatever. There was no way of applying pressure to the school board -- no way, in fact, of knowing precisely what they were doing, except by the effect of their decisions -- and no Home and School Association.

And -- perhaps this is most important -- everyone connected with the schools thought, or was encouraged to think, that school business was an internal matter in which citizens were not to be interested.

Teachers were encouraged to live outside Digby, or at least to leave town on weekends if at all possible. (This feeling seems rather common, at least in Nova Scotia: at the Nova Scotia Summer School it is recommended that teachers live in another community than that in which they teach.)

And this passage occurs in the teacher's handbook (page 46, just below the notice that "Smoking by women teachers is accepted but may provoke comment when practiced in public"):

GOSSIP

Digby is a typical small town and people enjoy gossip. Be on your guard for you'll be catechized for the latest "school dirt". You will also be on the receiving end and your past will be pried into and found out. What cannot be ascertained may be supplied through over-active imaginations. Be courteous but it is suggested that, for your own peace of mind, you keep your own counsel. Make your own judgements and don't be overly anxious to jump to conclusions. All too frequently we find those most maligned turn out to be our loyal friends. Please consider all matters pertaining to school organization, staff and routine as taboo topics outside the four walls of the school. Parents' interest in school does not extend to internal management and routine problems.

One wonders to what it does legitimately extend. Or what the school administration is likely to consider "routine" or "internal".

Clearly, if you are a good administrator and one interested in neatness and efficiency, and if you are yourself almost entirely responsible for the existence of the institution you administer, you're likely to think of it as your private property and of interested citizens as meddling outsiders. And that's essentially what had happened in Digby.

It's easy to see, too, why it might happen. F.C. Purdy was accepted as a sort of benevolent dictator. The school's reputation was creditable, and if its rate of teacher turnover was extraordinarily high, that was all right: teachers who stayed too long might find themselves becoming involved in the community.

4 a complex drama

HENRY RUCKER, THEN, ARRIVING FROM Glenville, West Virginia, was taking up a rôle in a drama far more complex and explosive than he had any way of knowing. To him, the issues seemed simple, as they often do to newcomers who aren't aware of the complex play of personalities involved. This is clear from his letter to the *Digby Courier* on November 13, in which Rucker called for regular, open school board meetings, which would welcome the attendance of teachers and parents; active Home and School Associations at every school; representatives of Teachers' Unions on school boards, and other such reforms.

But Rucker did not know that the oligarchical structure of the schools and of the Digby community as a whole was already defending itself against attack from people like Dr. and Mrs. R.A. Armstrong (the Armstrongs, Digby residents of eleven years standing, had already made their position known -- to the extent that Superintendent Purdy regularly warned newcomers to the school or hospital not to associate with the Armstrongs). Nor was Rucker aware of the extent to which the strike against extended school-bus duty on the part of Nova Scotia Teachers' Union members had exacerbated hostility toward teachers and their union in conservative Western Nova Scotia.

What Henry Rucker *did* know by November was that the ready hospitality of at least part of the Digby community was cooling rapidly. Frequent visitors and inspectors in his classroom seemed unhappy with his teaching (this was of course his first attempt at teaching and he readily admits that at first he had some difficulty, which was complicated by the frequency of inspections and the persistent rumours, which began, he says, as early as September, that he was to be fired). His sometimes casual dress (he always wore a tie, he says, but he twice wore a sleeveless, multi-coloured jacket which earned him an unofficial reprimand) and beard (neatly trimmed though it was, and is) seemed to him to be making him the center of more attention than was devoted to most new teachers.

And his fairly outspoken and perhaps somewhat naive hostility toward the educational system probably earned him some enemies -- this too is a common situation when "outsiders" come into a situation where people have become accustomed to traditional ways of doing things. At any rate, Rucker later said "Digby Regional High School was run like some of the prisons I've visited, humiliating students continuously, shaming them as much as possible, disallowing any creative activity or free discussion. In some respects it was much like a mental institution." He objected also to what he considered the pro-American -- and often racist -- bias of the textbooks, and to the lack of Canadian content in the courses.

Presumably, also, his involvement in the bus strike dispute did not serve to endear him to the educational establishment in Digby; he was among those who accused the admin-

istration -- especially Superintendent Purdy -- of intimidating elementary school teachers (among them Henry Rucker's wife Nancy) into signing a petition stating that they had no objections to the extra outside duties which were being demanded of teachers.

5 firings and reasons

AND THE REPORTS ON THE QUALITY OF HIS teaching from the inspectors were not very encouraging. Rucker says that he was ill during one inspection and in general handicapped by bad textbooks, cramped quarters -- in some of his classes there were not enough desks to go around -- and by the prescription that new teachers should "adhere closely to the prescribed courses and delay request for deviation" until more familiar with the "philosophy of our school" (as outlined in a letter from the Supervisor of Schools, C.C. MacInnes.) But in any case the reports were replete with phrases like "In my opinion the teacher was not well prepared," "Students bored and so am I," "No usable lesson plan," "Teacher's mannerisms which have a tendency to detract." (These -- his abrupt movements and his tendency "to feel his beard and chin whiskers" -- were to become important subsequently.) According to the inspectors, Rucker lectured from the textbook and had poor control of his class. It seems clear, in fact, that at this point of his career he was not a very good teacher. It is possible that some of his unhappiness with the system was due to this. But it is also clear that there are many worse teachers -- everyone who has gone to high school or university has known some of them -- who are in fact not fired. And certainly they are not fired after less than three months of teaching.

But F.C. Purdy mailed a registered letter to Rucker on the 21st of November which said in part:

I have been instructed by the Digby Regional School Board to advise you that the Board by unanimous resolution decided to terminate your contract to become effective November 30, 1969. The reason for this action by the Board is unsatisfactory performance of your probationary contract.

Exit Henry Rucker.

Or so it seems to have been planned -- and so, in fact, it seemed in Digby for a while. The *Digby Courier* did not publish any report of the firing -- the first mention, in fact, was on December 4, when the agenda for an upcoming Teachers' Union meeting, printed in the *Courier*, included

a consideration of the dismissal of Rucker.

Another dark hint that something was in the wind occurred in a letter in the *Courier* by Mrs. Armstrong, calling for open school board meetings and referring to the practice of hiring and firing teachers "with such gay abandon ... Who is it that hires teachers and has such poor judgement that some have to be fired again in five minutes, year after year?"

In fact, Rucker had decided not to make a quiet exit -- unlike, it appears, all those teachers whose quiet departures over the years had contributed to the reputation Digby had acquired for rapid turnover in personnel. He had gone immediately to the Nova Scotia Teachers' Union, who had informed him that he had a right to appeal such a decision. A school board meeting was held on 8 December, at which the board decided to grant Rucker twenty days to appeal the decision and therefore to extend his salary for that period.

Ultimately a full-dress hearing was held on January 19-21. The charges against Rucker were divided into a seven-item list, but they boiled down to three: (1) the administration and the inspectors thought he wasn't a very good teacher; (2) there was what was described as an "unfortunate altercation in staff room with a fellow teacher that spilled over into the corridor and was witnessed by student groups, an incident which required intervention of the principal -- a most unprofessional conduct that has provoked a good deal of unfavorable public comment"; and (3) those unfortunate "mannerisms" of Rucker's. In testimony, some other elements came out. The principal, J.E. Ritcey, for instance, commented, according to the Digby *Courier*, that "an untidy appearance of Mr. Rucker accounted for much of the disciplinary problems."

6 the evidence factory

Subsequently, the appeal board found that Rucker had been dismissed for reasons not readily comprehensible to an outsider -- nor indeed those stated in the original charges. One member of the appeal board commented that "initially, attention was directed to Mr. Rucker for considerations that were completely extraneous to his performance as a teacher." Mr. Nicholson, another member, observed that the School Board might have been expected to know that Rucker had no teaching experience and to be prepared to help him to find his way; they would also, he suggested, have known about the "mannerisms" from the interview. Moreover, Rucker was observed almost immediately after the beginning of the fall term when he could hardly be expected to have learned much about teaching.

The conclusion that Rucker was fired for other reasons becomes unavoidable when the charge involving the "unfortunate altercation" is considered; Judge C. Roger Rand, the appeal board chairman, made that point in indicating the exaggerations -- if not plain lies -- involved in the original charge.

"The manner in which this incident is written up as No. 5 of the reasons why the School Board suspended Rucker," he says, "is such as to lead those who did not hear the sworn evidence to believe that a small riot was in progress

with students viewing this unprofessional conduct on the part of Rucker. Nothing could be further from the sworn evidence that we heard." What in fact happened was an argument about NSTU rules, complicated by the fact that Rucker was distressed by the pressures he said were being applied to his wife during the bus dispute. The argument ended amicably, with Rucker and his disputant, Lawrence Banks, another teacher, reconciled. No students saw the event, nor was violence involved.

But what is most interesting is the conclusion the appeal board came to about the manufactured "incident" -- that the only time you have to manufacture such evidence is when you don't have enough real evidence, or can't use what you have. Clearly, whatever the real reasons for Rucker's firing had been -- and they can only be known by inference, since probably the people responsible were not fully aware of their own motives -- they had nothing to do with education. And that's the tragedy of the affair.

7 petitions and purges

THE APPEAL BOARD CLEARLY SAW THE problem as other than an educational one; they ordered that Rucker be reinstated and suggested that "there is a situation amongst the personnel employed by the Digby Regional School Board that is not a happy one and some effective action should be taken to eliminate that situation."

If in fact the motives of the School Board in dismissing Rucker had been pedagogical, what could they have been expected to do? What were the alternatives?

One obvious alternative would be to reinstate Rucker and try to find ways to help him become a better teacher. One could also begin making some attempt to find out why the situation among the personnel was an unhappy one and find ways to rectify it, beginning by holding staff meetings, open board meetings, and public forums about the schools, their curricula and methods.

But if, on the other hand, the motives were essentially political, if the dismissal of Rucker and the harassment of those who defended him (harassment which was testified to at the hearing and which was to culminate later) were directed at the preservation of a social and political *status quo* where real power was held by a very limited group who were unaccountable to the community at large, what action would you expect? Clearly, a tightening of ranks and an attempt to gather the respectable forces of the community behind the School Board and its decision.

And that was, in fact, the case. Purdy, Ritcey (the high school principal), and MacInnes (the Supervisor of Schools) resigned.

The results of this -- some of them, anyway -- were predictable. On February 12, the *Courier* reported that by an agreement made between Rucker's representative and the representative of the School Board, Rucker was not remaining in Digby. "The resignation of Mrs. Henry Rucker from the St. Patrick's School staff has also been accepted. It is understood that Mr. and Mrs. Rucker and daughter will be leaving Digby to take up residence elsewhere." A week later, the *Courier* said that four hundred people (it turned out later to be 378) had signed a petition asking Purdy, Ritcey and MacInnes to withdraw their resignations. A heavily-attended meeting of the Teachers' Union local voted to support the three administrators and forced the resignation of their own executive. A more administratively-oriented executive was later installed. Among those forced out was Roger Matheson, an industrial arts teacher and President of the local, who had testified for Rucker at his hearing. On February 26, the *Courier* published notice of a public meeting to "restore order" in the public schools; the meeting was held on the 28th and attracted over 600 people, who voted to ask the three administrators, again, to reconsider their resignations. Purdy responded by making his a retirement but announced that it was still final. Ultimately Ritcey and MacInnes did withdraw their resignations.

8 holding the schools for ransom

THUS THE SITUATION was converted into an attack on the whole school system. The report was, as the Digby and Annapolis *Mirror* pointed out, interpreted not as a comment on a specific situation, but as an attack on the overall quality of education in Digby under the existing administration. By resigning, the three administrators served notice that any attempt to modify the structure of the schools would result in chaos -- not because the reformers intended it to, but because the administrators would hold the system for ransom. No one had envisioned, and few desired, the resignations; when they came they threatened the system with anarchy. And to the minds of most Digbyites the threat came not from Purdy, Ritcey and MacInnes but from outsiders like Rucker and the appeal board. The clear result of this threat whenever it is used is to keep people from rocking the boat. If I lean out over the gunwhale, and *you* rock the boat -- who's responsible for the capsizing?

In any case, the Digby educational boat was all but awash by the beginning of March and things got no better during that month. Further public meetings were held, at the urging of a committee of concerned Digbyites headed by Fred Harris; one organized a Home and School and another, on the 26th, received a petition containing 1350 signatures calling for the firing of Purdy. Harris charged there would have been more, but that many citizens were afraid to speak out for fear of losing their jobs.

This seemed to be a fairly justified fear, since Purdy effectively controlled two of Digby's biggest employers,

the school and the hospital. And in fact both of the teachers who had testified for Rucker at the appeal board hearings were quietly fired (i.e. their contracts were not renewed) during the month. They were Roger Matheson, President of the Digby NSTU local -- who was later to receive an award for teaching at a convention of the American Industrial Arts Association -- and Neil Cullens, vice-principal of the High School. On March 17 and 18, students held a protest march and momentary sit-in to protest the firings, but of course to no avail.

9 provincial survey

At the end of March, however, the vessel began to wallow in earnest when it was announced that a three member commission had been appointed by the Minister of Education to undertake a quiet, two-week long study of the Digby school situation. The survey team, composed of Halifax School Superintendent Dr. Maurice Keating, chartered accountant G.M. Murray and Digby area school inspector Clifford Edwards, released its report at the end of March.

The report of the survey team was -- in the eyes of everyone except the eternally optimistic Digby *Courier* (see box) -- a disaster for the Digby school system's administration. Its indictment of the administration, which attained wide currency, found seven basic and major defects in Digby's school system: the public, it charged, was kept in ignorance of all school matters; the administration was rigid and inflexible; statements of policy and responsibility were vague or unavailable or nonexistent; there was an authoritarian tendency to decide things for other people "without any reference to their expressed wishes"; the administration was almost fanatically preoccupied with finances, to the detriment of education and humanity; teachers were hired without reference to provincial regulations; and finances were concealed. The survey team offered fifteen recommendations for improving the situation, most of which were directed at opening up the closed circle in which decisions were made and making the school system more responsive to the Digby community; and many of the recommendations were precisely what many people in Digby had been calling for from the beginning. Both local papers had been carrying, for months, occasional letters calling for some information about the financial status and policy of the schools.

Interestingly, Superintendent Purdy did not seem to understand the thrust of the report. In a response to it directed to the School Board on April 14, he was both perplexed that the report didn't seem to consider the excellence of the education provided by the Digby system, and

unconvinced that he had ever exceeded his authority. As for specific recommendations, he said that some of them seemed "obviously designed to placate the advocates of the 'new thinking' and the 'mischief makers'" (emphasis his), and asserted that "I could not possibly subscribe to the idea that a school administrator should not be concerned intimately with 'dollars and cents.'" He went on in a rather petulant tone, "The role of the superintendent as advocated by the 'new thinkers' in education is completely unacceptable to me and for this reason my retirement from education in Nova Scotia should probably have occurred several years past."

He argued that of the fifteen recommendations, most were already in effect and the rest were unworkable. He seemed unable to interpret the recommendations in any but the most literal and concrete sense, or to see that it was the spirit of his administration which was being attacked.

10 the King of Education

THE RELEASE OF THE REPORT brought wide publicity to the case, including a national report on the CBC. All those in favour of educational reform in Digby were encouraged by the survey team's forthright agreement with the reformist position. Optimism reigned. If, as Nick Fillmore of *The Fourth Estate* suggested in his article on Digby, wholesale changes at the higher levels might be needed, surely now was the time. If, as the *Valley Outlook* had said (in an editorial reprinted in the *Mirror* on April 1 which is probably the best single statement on the situation made by any newspaper), the problem was that "too many people in administration of schools in Digby county have been in their positions too

THE COURIER TELLS IT LIKE IT OUGHT TO BE

One of the hard lessons to be learned from a situation like Digby's is how much difference the responsibility -- or irresponsibility -- of the local paper can make. The Digby *Courier* consistently took positions of blind local patriotism and manic optimism throughout the crisis, and did not hesitate to distort the news in order to maintain Digby's "good image". Examples:

* When Digby High students protested the firings of Matheson and Cullens in March, the *Courier* headlined its story "Sunny Skies Aid Protest March" and began "Sunny skies added greatly to the pleasure of some three hundred students ... when they staged a march through the streets of Digby." Later in the story: "It was taken for granted by many of the citizens that a number of the marchers did not know why they were marching but liked the day out of school. Among them were students whose parents made no secret of the fact that they were fully behind the administration at DRHS." The article went on to report interviews with students who didn't understand the situation fully or who had been in Digby only a short time.

* Every paper that reported on the Survey Team report called it an indictment of the Digby school system (including the *Chronicle-Herald*, the Digby and Annapolis *Mirror*, and *The Fourth Estate*) -- but the *Courier* ran a long rebuttal of the report, titled "Rivalries in Community Cloud Real School Issues" and almost totally obscured the thrust of the report. The article observed that "Problems ... began in the fall of 1969 after the dismissal of a probationary teacher" (an example of a fairly high level of naiveté, to say the least) and protested in an editorial the following week that "we saw nothing (in the report) which might come under the category of a 'searing indictment' ... which a wanting-to-be-popular little tabloid in another part of the province would make out it is."

* In its April 16 issue, the *Courier* reported that Roger Matheson, "Industrial Arts Teacher at Digby Regional High School ... received an Outstanding Industrial Arts Teacher Award" at a convention of the American Industrial Arts Association at Louisville, Kentucky -- but neglects to mention that Matheson had been fired by the Digby School Board.

* Perhaps the most amusing example of editorial myopia though, is the *Courier's* response to the CBC *Weekend* show on Digby. In the news columns of its issue for 14 May the *Courier* presents an account of who was on the program as though it were social news, referring only vaguely and in passing to the subject and not at all to the slant of the show; the *Courier* was clearly gratified at the fact that "The name of Digby was given prominence throughout entire Canada." The headline is "Digby Gets National T.V. Recognition." In an editorial the paper complains vaguely about a waste of the taxpayer's money -- not because the CBC did the show in the first place, which one might understand, but because the staff taped interviews which weren't shown and wasted the tape. Apparently some Digbyites had their feelings hurt when they were edited out of the program -- especially, one suspects, because the star of the program was a cleaning lady at a local motel.

In the same issue appear two statements which will bear thought: "Nobody else but Digbyites in spirit can keep Digby free from ills which plague other areas," and "no medium ... reflects the community in its true spirit better than its newspaper." The *Courier's* practice, however, reverses the process: if the bad news doesn't appear in the paper, then it never happened in the community.

long," surely something could be done now that the whole nation knew of Digby's plight.

But it was not to be. A visit to Digby in the fall of 1970 shows appallingly little change. And much of what *has* changed hardly resembles improvement: Matheson, Cullens and Rucker are gone. So are many other teachers (including, ironically, Rucker's replacement -- see box). The vacancy rate is as high as ever; only slightly more than 60 per cent of the High School's teachers stayed on for 1970-71.

Most things, though, remain the same. Ritcey and MacInnes occupy pretty much the same positions they had a year ago. The petition demanding the firing of Purdy has had the result that a luncheon in his honour in June crowned Purdy "King of Education" in Digby County. His name still appeared as Superintendent of Schools in an advertisement for teachers published in the *Chronicle-Herald* in July -- though his retirement was supposed to have taken effect in June. His retirement dinner in August saw him still unreplaced as superintendent and, according to many Digby residents, still firmly in charge. Rumours were afloat that the School Board was going to follow Purdy's advice and phase out the office of superintendent and retain Purdy as some sort of special consultant -- in effect back to position one.

Perhaps most significant is the attempt on the part of the school board to rename the High School "F. Courtney Purdy High School" in his honour -- at the request of no more than 30 people. As Mrs. R.A. Armstrong, one of the most articulate participants in the Digby struggle, says, "The utter lack of sensitivity shown here is remarkable... the kids themselves are very annoyed at the idea of changing the name of their school and I can see a provocative act such as this name change is an incitement to disaster -- coming, as it does, at the beginning of a new school year."

11 the permanent file

BUT THE MOST CONVINCING evidence that the more things change the more they remain the same is contained in an incident which happened at the beginning of summer. The Armstrong's son, Peter, graduated from Digby Regional High School this spring. As students do at graduation, he autographed copies of the yearbook for classmates. Being the son of his parents and having some opinions of his own, he wrote (on at least one occasion) under his picture: "Peter Armstrong -- may the system be screwed." Not very original, perhaps, but clearly a not entirely unjustifiable philosophical position for a seventeen-year old boy in Digby in 1970.

What is interesting is that the Armstrong's received, on June 24, in an envelope bearing the return address of the Superintendent of Schools for Digby, a Xerox copy of the offending page. Typed across the top was the following curt and portentous message:

"We are certain that you must be very proud of your son. This will be placed in his permanent record file."

The temerity and naiveté of this are no more astonishing than the conviction of moral authority and political arrogance it conveys. One wonders whether it's possible even to think of modifying a system which can produce as flagrant an attempt at intimidation as this.

The moral of the fable of Digby? Progress in educational reform comes hard. You'd better be prepared to lose your job, to have "rebel" put "on your permanent record card" -- and to lose.

RESIGN OR RESIGN YOURSELF

Ironically, the teacher who replaced Rucker, Christopher Fairbrother, resigned himself near the end of the year. His reasons, as outlined in a letter to the *Mirror*, are revealing: he begins by pointing out that when he came he was not interested in the Rucker dismissal, and goes on:

Soon after I assumed duty at Digby Regional High School, the Rucker hearing ended, and I realised that a perfectly impartial and just decision had been made by Judge Rand. It occurred to me then that Henry Rucker had been dismissed largely for the fact that he was openly critical of the establishment and its narrow, old-fashioned autocratic ways...

I certainly realised that the administration had made a mistake with regard to Henry Rucker. I thought they would learn from this ... (but) lo and behold, two more teachers got the same kind of treatment Henry Rucker had received. It was then that I realised where my sympathies lay ... I was for the students, lock, stock and barrel. I teach them, I am reasonably close to them in age, and, I may say, in my view of the future. After all, it is they and not the administration who will inherit tomorrow. That the students liked the two educators who were being phased out was enough for me.

I began to apply for jobs outside of Digby. I could not envisage another year as a teacher under the direction of men whom I did not trust nor yet could understand. I felt that the lack of communication evidenced from the superintendent on down was symptomatic of a rigid and inflexible system. And I know, and teach, that no system is absolute, nor perfect ...

But I wish the students to know that I see their problem and understand their complaints. A number of us who are leaving do also. The tragedy is that we must leave, and there's an end of it.

How many teachers of this calibre are driven out of our educational system every year? How long will it be before we start finding ways of retaining them?