

EDUCATION FOR WHAT? *

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It is daunting enough to be addressing a coterie — or is it a clutch? — of Vice-Chancellors; it is downright intimidating to be doing so at nine in the morning in the knowledge that you plan to spend the rest of the day dissecting the subject of my early reflections. But dawn has its rewards no less than twilight and I thank you for this opportunity of opening a window on your enquiry rather than — as is so often my valedictory role — of drawing a curtain on dialogue already ended.

Your theme is international co-operation and development: the role of the universities. The former is a field in which I must be, perforce, a practitioner; it would be rewarding for me if together we could explore some corner of it. The latter — the universities' role — is an excursion for which my best credentials are your invitation itself.

To speak of international co-operation and development is to speak of the past no less than the present; and it is to speak of the future also. Indeed, a thin line divides evaluation of the past from analysis of the present, and both from prospects for the future. But it is of the future mainly that I speak in the context of the role of the universities.

More than any other single factor, it is perhaps the insight of the world as a community of people needing each other for survival and having a common interest in the quality of the human condition worldwide that will determine the fate of the dialogue between North and South, between rich and poor, in the remaining years of this century. But it will determine much more than that; for international co-operation and development — or, as I would prefer to see them more conjoined, international co-operation for development — is not a thing apart. It could be human destiny entire. It is not, as we once conceived it, a little bit of goodness measured in aid, like alms on Sunday; it has to do with the structure of human relationships in all its facets.

That is why international co-operation for development cannot be a matter

***Keynote address delivered at the Conference of Vice-Chancellors of Commonwealth Universities, Mona, Jamaica, 26th March 1979, on the theme of "International Co-operation and Development: The Role of the Universities".**

for the economists only. They will forgive me if I say it is much too important for that. It will not, therefore, suffice, in fulfilling the universities' role, merely to salve an inter-disciplinary conscience. Much more is involved than having development economics on the syllabus or an institute for development studies on the campus. The role of the universities in the matter of international co-operation for development goes rather to the heart of the question: "Education for what?" Are we to produce another generation of scientists blinkered by belief that poverty and inequality within and between states are for the other culture, and that the scientific community will serve best if left to work untroubled by such distractions; or another generation of doctors for whom medicine begins where the architects and engineers end, and who see their professionalism debased by proximity to the grim realities of rural health care; or another generation of lawyers mindless of the social quality of the law whose rule they passionately uphold, like some elite imperial guard for whom loyalty becomes more virtuous than justice; or, closer to home, more academics, particularly in the developing world, wedded to classical notions of pampered and privileged campuses? Are we to produce, in the end, another generation of polished professionals assured of preferred places out of the sun, rather than a cadre of truly educated people whose horizons are human welfare and who see their own and their society's prosperity not as ends in themselves but as elements in the totality of human happiness? All these are among the questions that international co-operation and development evoke in terms of the role of the universities.

I do not ignore, of course, that there are bold spirits — many, I am sure, among you — mindful of the new imperatives: in science, in medicine, in law, in education and in university administration. But do they as yet represent the mainstream of thought in our centres of excellence? Or are they tributaries that trickle without trace into the wastelands of intellectual self-satisfaction or personal despair?

The point I am groping towards is that international co-operation for development is so all-encompassing in terms of the quality of human life worldwide, that our universities would be irrelevant to our times were they not to perceive and develop a role of substance and practicality in relation to it and to its central question of securing a more stable, just and habitable planet. "The new word for peace is development", said Pope Paul VI in his fifth encyclical. The role of the universities cannot begin to be developed with any measure of relevance and significance unless international co-operation for development is itself acknowledged in these fundamentalist terms.

At the heart of that role, therefore, I would place the development of an ethos of the world as the single community we are. This means that our

universities must help to liberate another generation (for it might be too late to free ourselves) from the shackles of sovereignty and the interest parameters of the nation state — and from the compulsions of an adversary system that divides rather than unites mankind even in the pursuit of shared objectives. The world has become a 'global village'; but we are yet to develop an ethic of community. We have made of our planet a single habitation, man's science in particular; but it remains a house divided against itself. *Homo sapiens*, the very symbol of our universities, is in danger of becoming an unguided missile destined to self-destruct unless he become *homo sentiens* as well. Our knowledge needs urgently to be infused with a quality of caring.

Is this not perhaps the essential role of the universities: to be in the vanguard of changing the world through changing man's perception of himself in relation to it? We shall not have in the next century, we do not have now, the options of yester-year. The world, for example, still holds in bondage, and each year holds more and more, "its huddled masses yearning to be free". But the empty lands of no new world await them promising release. The great movements of peoples the world over are probably ended forever; and only galactic fantasies promise escape to other worlds. The way forward must lie in making this world new. "There is another world," Paul Eluard reminded us, "but it is in this one." That other world here on this one earth — which we must better and more fairly share — is the imperative to which international co-operation for development summons us. I suggest that to help mankind discover and inhabit it should be not just the role, but the vocation, of the universities as we approach the twenty-first century.

DESERVING OUR ESTEEM

When most of the universities of the developing world were established — whether in the pre-independence or post-independence period — the concept of the university the founders had in mind was only in part that of a cloistered community of scholars in the mirror image of the great and ancient universities. It was also allied to the expectation that the new universities would play a dynamic part in the processes of nation-building, in their deepest connotations, and in the generation of development within these processes. And it was this latter image of the university as a factor of development that became more dominant with the years, and led governments to provide increasingly larger funds for higher education in the confident assumption that educational investment would have a guaranteed return in economic benefit. Even though governments throughout the developing world were committed to the provision of universal primary

education, they in fact, in many cases, made provision for higher education at the expense of expanding primary school facilities.

I do not need to remind you that this conventional wisdom has now come to be questioned; the traditional belief that investment in education has a direct pay-off in economic benefit is being increasingly assailed. Even if the social value of universal education is not being doubted, the demands of education on scarce national resources are being more rigorously assessed against the competing claims of other sectors. And what is of special interest in the context of the role of the universities is that, in the debate on the economics of education, an emerging issue is the distribution of educational expenditure between the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of the educational pyramid. In both respects, as between sectors and within the educational sector, the pressure for reallocation of resources works against the universities. There is a growing feeling that higher education has absorbed too high a proportion of educational budgets to produce expensively educated young people who are unsuited to the jobs that wait to be filled. The phenomenon of the educated unemployed, or the educated unemployable, is no longer confined to one or two countries; and the social tensions increasingly created by this problem, as well as the demand for a more egalitarian distribution of educational opportunities, is likely to add to the call for changed priorities in educational investment.

Elitism is, of course, not a new stick for the chastisement of institutions of higher learning; but it is likely to be wielded more frequently unless universities are demonstrably more successful in proving their relevance to the felt needs of their communities. Many universities in the Third World will be under challenge to prove that they have adapted themselves to the changing needs of their societies as the societies move from dormant colonies to nation states impatiently seeking a better life for their people through real development. But universities in the industrialised countries, also, are not free from rigorous scrutiny at the bar of relevance; for change is not a phenomenon of young countries alone; it is as acutely a feature of older states.

For all, therefore, it would be unsafe any longer to take it for granted that the case for the traditional university is accepted as axiomatic. As in other aspects of social organisation, every facet of university activity will come under questioning and appraisal. Validity and relevance will need to be established and confirmed again and again. If our universities are to hold their own, both in the standing of their countries and in the competition for resources, they must be able constantly to demonstrate that they deserve to be esteemed. There can be few more favourable areas in which to make that demonstration than in the role the universities accept and discharge over the remaining years of this century in the cause of international co-operation and development.

THIRD WORLD UNIVERSITIES: A DYNAMIC ROLE

May I, in that specific context, address a word to the universities of the developing world? Most of the answers to development lie at home. International co-operation must help to remove the external constraints which are formidable and numerous; but their removal facilitates, it does not in itself assure, development. Self-reliant development is in many respects the goal of international co-operation. All universities have a role in helping to make that co-operation more probable; and many of the universities of the developed world have approached it with earnestness. In fact, most of the really advanced work being done in establishing the intellectual premises for North/South co-operation is being done in the universities and research institutes of the developed world. But Third World universities also have important contributions to make — and far too little is being done. It is as if our universities have decided that international co-operation is for diplomats mainly. Perhaps they are assisted by too many of our governments implying that it is. But, just as development is too important to be left to the economists, so international co-operation is too important to be left to the politicians and the bureaucrats. This is all the more urgent since, in this realm, we have moved from status to contract, from petition to negotiation, from resolution to remedy.

The universities always had a role to play; but it is now a more vital role. What the Third World needs urgently is massive technical support for the negotiating process and, at least as important, perhaps even more so, the technical underpinnings of co-operation between developing countries that would enlarge the countervailing power of the South in negotiations with the North. Viewed objectively, far too great a gap exists between the universities of the South and those who work on its behalf in the area of international co-operation. Governments, of course, share in the responsibility for this gap; but I am speaking with you of the role of the universities, not the role of governments. And there is no question that the universities themselves share the blame for their failure to become an effective Third World resource in this essential area of the dialogue of international co-operation. And this has nothing to do with dwelling in ivory towers. Detachment can be as effective outside the struggle as above it. The universities of the South must be less reticent in advancing their services, even their ideas, certainly their involvement, in these areas of real action.

But an even greater responsibility devolves upon them in the realm of development. For here we are dealing with national effort for improving the quality of life at home — with mobilising the resources of the community for real development. I know that governments are sometimes not the easiest

partners for progress; but they are the necessary ones. Too many of our academics seem to believe that the choice is between sycophancy and hostility and in the end opt for disengagement. Too few persist in the admittedly rugged effort to contribute. The Third World cannot afford to cultivate in its universities an intellectual garden of tender plants that wilt in the first light of political displeasure. A sturdier growth is needed that can survive through all political weathers and bloom in the unsettled conditions that are the inevitable environment of their time and place. Academic freedom will itself be placed in jeopardy if it covers either the retreat to benign indifference or the advance to studied opposition. There is a high ground of constructive contribution that the academic communities of the developing world can and must attain and hold in the struggle for development.

Many within the universities of the South perceive this clearly; and some are, indeed, contributing. Their contribution, however, is but a fraction of what it might be, and governments, as I have said, are more and more calling into question the high cost of the non-involvement of their institutions of learning in the day to day problems of living. They know that at home no less than in the world at large the new name for 'peace' is 'development'. They will not accept a university role which is passive in so critical a cause.

The correlation between learning and development, always valid, can no longer be ignored. Academic detachment is not a development option for the universities: certainly not for the universities of the South; but really not for the universities of the North either. The result is an imperative of involvement which brings me back to my question: "Education for what?" In its answer, I believe, lies the real challenge of the role of the universities in international co-operation and development.