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COLONIAL UNIVERSITIES AND THEIR FUNCTIONS*

IN announcing in the House of Commons on July 13, 1943, the appointment of two commissions to report on higher education in the British Colonies, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Col. Oliver Stanley, said that he regarded educational advance and economic development as the twin pillars upon which any sound scheme of political responsibility must be based. If the goal of Colonial self-government was to be achieved, Colonial universities and colleges would have to play an immense part in that development. They would, first of all, have to meet the enormously increased need for trained professional workers which growing social and economic services would necessitate, providing the agriculturists, the engineers, the medical men, the teachers, the veterinary surgeons, and the specialists and technicians which the approach to higher standards of life entailed. They would be required to carry out an immense amount of research, and, finally, they would have a great extra-mural task of stimulating general progress throughout the areas of which they were centres, and encouraging the production of teachers from those who gain their knowledge and experience from their daily life.

The four reports which have now come from these two Commissions—for the report of Mr. Justice Asquith's Commission is supplemented by a report from the West Indies Committee of that Commission appointed with Sir James Irvine as chairman in January 1944 "to review existing facilities for higher education in the British Colonies in the Caribbean and to make recommendations regarding future university development for those colonies", while that of the Commission on Higher Education in West Africa, reporting under like terms of reference for that area, comprises both a majority report signed by the chairman, the Right Hon. Walter Elliot, and eight of the members, and a minority report signed by Dr. H. J. Channon, Sir Geoffrey Evans, Dr. Julian Huxley, Mr. A. Creech Jones and Dr. Margaret Read—are notable additions to the literature on the idea and purpose of a university. Considering, in accordance with the terms of reference of the Asquith Commission, the principles which should guide the promotion of higher education, learning and research and the development of universities in the Colonies, and exploring the means whereby universities and other appropriate bodies in Great Britain may co-operate with institutions of higher education in the Colonies to give effect to such principles, the Commissions have produced a series of reports in which the functions of a university, the relation between teaching and research, between academic and extra-mural activities are defined with a lucidity and a certainty that make these reports almost as pertinent to discussions on university

* Report of the Commission on Higher Education in the Colonies. (Cmd. 6647.) Pp. 119. (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1945.) 2s. net.

Report of the West Indies Committee of the Commission on Higher Education in the Colonies. (Cmd. 6654.) Pp. 81. (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1945.) 1s. 3d. net.

Report of the Commission on Higher Education in West Africa. (Cmd. 6655.) Pp. 190. (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1945.) 3s. net.

development in Britain as in the Colonies. No better statement on the place of research could be desired than that to be found in the report of the Asquith Commission, and, quantitatively as well as qualitatively, the reports emphasize the close dependence of Colonial development and expansion in this field on the university expansion already contemplated in Great Britain.

Naturally, there is much common ground in these reports, and if the principles are dealt with rather more fully in that from the Asquith Commission, it should not be assumed that the same principles are not adequately emphasized in the others. Pointing out first that the four Colonial universities now in existence—the Royal University of Malta, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the University of Hong-Kong and the University of Ceylon—serve only a small proportion of those who live in the Colonies, the Asquith Commission bases the case for the establishment of universities in fresh areas on much the same argument as that used by Colonel Oliver Stanley. In the stage preparatory to self-government, universities have an indispensable part to play. To them we must look for the men and women with the standards of public service and capacity for leadership which self-rule requires. It is the university which should offer the best means of counter-acting the influence of racial differences and sectional rivalries which impede the formation of political institutions on a national basis. Moreover, universities serve the double purpose of refining and maintaining all that is best in local traditions and cultures; and at the same time they provide a means whereby those brought up under the influence of these traditions and cultures may enter on a footing of equality into the world-community of intellect.

There is, in the Commission's view, no fundamental antithesis between liberal and vocational education, although the distinction has not yet been fully transcended in the universities of Britain. A university is in a far better position than a specialized institution to provide the courses, both in arts and science, which are the necessary preliminary to professional studies; and, while admitting that the promotion of popular instruction is most urgent, the Commission holds that the development of university education is the more imperative on that account, and as the first step urges the immediate setting up of university colleges. Such colleges would later, in accordance with the advice of an inter-university council, develop into universities serving appropriate areas.

The appropriateness of the area to be served by a university should be determined, according to the Asquith Commission, neither by size nor by population, but by the capacity to supply an adequate flow of students able to profit from higher education; and in accordance with this principle the Asquith Commission and the Irvine West Indies Committee specifically recommend the establishment of a University of the West Indies located in Jamaica. The Commission also supports the recommendation for the establishment of a university in Malaya, the proposal to develop Makerere College in East Africa

to full university status, and the scheme for the development of Gordon Memorial College, Khartoum. The recommendation of the minority report of the West Africa Commission for the development of a single institution of university rank to serve the whole of British West Africa, entitled the West African University College and located at Ibadan in Nigeria, with a territorial college in each of the three main dependencies, appears to be more in keeping with this principle than that of the majority for the development of three university colleges at Ibadan, at Achimota in the Gold Coast, and at Fourah Bay in Sierra Leone.

Discussing next the range of studies, the Asquith Commission insists in the first place on the importance of a balance between professional and other studies, and accordingly the universities should include teaching in a fairly wide range of subjects. Every student, urges the Commission, should be given an opportunity to become aware of certain great conceptions. He should know something of the place of science in modern civilization and the use of scientific method; he should have learnt something of what is meant by sociology, so that he is aware of the other elements and forms of civilization. He should be enabled to gain some apprehension of what is involved in philosophy in its widest meaning, and some sense of the past as expressed in great literature and in the record of history. If his time at the university does not open his eyes to the existence of those great forces in modern life, the student, however expert in his own work, will have missed one of the great advantages which the university can offer him; here one may well wonder what proportion of students at British universities have really seized the opportunities to which the Asquith Commission points.

This vital principle appears largely to have been overlooked by the majority of the Elliot Commission, though both Commissions recognize the importance of a sound principle: the universities should be residential. Similarly, there is adequate recognition of the importance of providing fully equipped libraries and laboratories, and buildings such as union premises and halls of residence; and questions relating to staff and their environment and conditions of service are discussed with full understanding of the personal issues involved. In particular, the importance of adequate contact with academic life in Great Britain and elsewhere is emphasized and, like the Colonial Research Committee, the Commission fully appreciates the necessity of mitigating the isolation of the teacher or investigator in Colonial universities and colleges. As is pointed out, the whole future of the proposed new universities may depend upon the intellectual standards, wisdom and experience in academic administration of those who mould a college into a university, and carry the university through its first years. At the best, it will not be easy to obtain sufficient men and women of the right quality; and the importance of conditions of leave, of superannuation and secondment as factors in attracting and retaining academic staff of the desired quality is not easily overstressed.

It is clearly to the advantage of the new universities and university colleges proposed in these reports that the fullest contact should be established between them and other centres of research in the territories they will serve. Such contacts will do much, as the Colonial Research Committee has already noted, to counteract the isolation in which research must often be carried on in the Colonies; but the Asquith Commission has rendered a notable service to the establishment of right relations by the clear and emphatic way in which it defines the place of research in the Colonial universities, the field open for such research, and their relations with institutes of applied science. Equally lucid is the chapter in which the Commission develops its argument for an Inter-University Council for Higher Education in the Colonies; that chapter alone leaves no room for doubt as to the help which the universities of Great Britain can render in the developments proposed, and the value of such developments in forging the permanent intellectual links which are so desirable in the world to-day in the interests of peaceful progress.

The Inter-University Council recommended by the Asquith Commission would be a co-operative organization of the universities of Great Britain and the Colonies, charged in general terms with the two distinct tasks of co-operating with existing Colonial universities and of fostering the development of Colonial colleges in their advance to university status. The Commission has not overlooked the work being done in a more general field by the Universities Bureau of the British Empire, but considers a new body would be more appropriate for the discharge of its special function in connexion with the staffing of Colonial university institutions. Here the proposed Council, which would probably carry out much of its work through an executive committee, and would be provided with a permanent secretariat, including a full-time secretary of distinction and experience, and adequate office accommodation, should render considerable service. Other functions of the Council, in addition to acquainting itself with the present position and need of the Colonial universities, would be to facilitate arrangements for such institutions to receive visitors annually, to advise them on any matter of academic policy or research on which they sought its help, to assist the placing of Colonial students in universities in Britain, and to encourage Colonial studies in the home universities and thus stimulate both valuable contributions to the literature on Colonial problems, and an increasing interest in Colonial affairs among their students. The Council would also be available for fostering co-operation with the Dominions or India. But the Commission does not recommend that it should be asked to advise on the allocation to Colonial universities and colleges of grants from United Kingdom funds; for that function an entirely new body, which might be known as the Colonial University Grants Advisory Committee, should be created.

The Commission considers that it is essential that Colonial universities should be autonomous in the sense in which the universities of Great Britain are

autonomous; although publication of an annual report, accompanied by a financial statement, and periodical visitation by a properly constituted authority are regarded as reasonable. A constitution is sketched for Colonial universities which offers the autonomy which secures the degree of freedom of teaching and research fundamental to a university, and the Commission examines with some care the period of transition from college to full university status before recommending that for the initial period students should enter for the London external degrees in continuance of the practice followed hitherto in several of the Colonial colleges. Degree-giving powers should be conferred on the Colonial institutions in due course; and the following qualifications are suggested: the staffs must have had adequate experience of work of a university standard; their conditions of work have permitted the active prosecution of research or original work; and a substantial number of students have completed satisfactorily the courses for degrees in a sufficient variety of academic subjects.

Finally, in this first part of its report, the Asquith Commission discusses the thorny problem of entrance qualifications, recommending the passing of a special college entrance examination; the provision of scholarships and financial assistance; the position of Colonial students in Great Britain, on which it recommends the extension of facilities for post-graduate studies, but the limitation of undergraduate study, as the colleges develop, mainly to those students taking exceptional subjects for which there is no local provision; and finance. As regards the last matter, it is considered that the establishment of a university in the West Indies will involve capital expenditure of about £1,130,000 and recurrent annual expenditure of £139,690; some additional funds will also be required by the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture at Trinidad. Considerable additional funds will be needed by Makerere College in East Africa, and financial assistance in varying degrees may be required in Palestine, by the Royal University of Malta, and in Malaya and Hong Kong. The majority proposals of the Elliot Commission involve capital expenditure of about £1,500,000 and recurrent annual expenditure of about £250,000. The minority report, without entering into detail regarding the financial aspects of its proposals, does not suggest that the capital expenditure involved is likely to be less, but that the elimination of the multiplication of university facilities will result in a somewhat smaller annual expenditure.

Both Commissions recommend that part of the funds available under the Colonial Development and Welfare Act should be specifically assigned to the establishment of universities in the Colonies, and refer to the importance of a stable annual income for orderly development. The Elliot Commission contemplates that ultimately the West African Governments will bear the whole annual cost, and the Asquith Commission points to the desirability of the Colonial institutions building up endowment funds.

(To be continued.)