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UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANISATION

IN the debate in the House of Lords on December 3, in which the Government accepted Lord Vansittart's motion for the encouragement of the development of close political and economic relations between the countries of Western Europe, Lord Lindsay spoke eloquently of the importance of relaxing in every way possible the regulations which make travel and the intercourse of minds difficult. He rightly stressed the value of the contribution to the unification of Europe which could come from abundant intercourse between the young; and on the cultural side, he also urged that energetic measures should be taken to deal with the scarcity of books, for books could be a real step towards establishing a common culture in Europe. Though the debate was pervaded with a sense of the ultimate necessity of such steps as Field-Marshal Smuts and Mr. Churchill have urged in recent speeches, no one suggested that a United States of Europe is as yet practical politics. Rather it was realized that there must be established once more that free intercourse of minds out of which creative ideas and action emerge in politics as well as in science and in art.

Something of the same impression came from the debate in the House of Commons on November 22 on the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation. Quoting from the preamble to the constitution of the Organisation, "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be reconstructed", Mr. Eric Fletcher urged the importance of more public attention being given to the work of the Organisation which, if backed by an informed public opinion, could, he believed, make a vital contribution to international understanding. He suggested that attacks on illiteracy, on the revision of text-books, and on the general book shortage should be among the first tasks to which the new Organisation could set its hand. The scientific field offers many opportunities for co-operation, and Mr. Fletcher mentioned in particular a publication entitled "The Tasks and Functions of the Secretariat's Division of Natural Science". There is grave danger, he believes, that the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation may attempt too much. In this he was vigorously supported by Mr. Kenneth Lindsay, who thinks that that has already occurred and that the Preparatory Commission ignored too much the growing points already in existence. Particularly in the scientific field, there are already many international bodies, some of which did not entirely cease to function even during the War. Dr. J. Needham, it is true, has pointed out the numerous gaps that persist, but it may well be that the Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation will serve the United Nations best if it is used here as a clearing house with a secretariat and a first-class personnel, and only establishes new bodies with great caution.

Mr. Lindsay pressed for more attention to the pioneer work of the Allied Ministers of Education,

and pointed to the work of the Association of University Professors and Lecturers of Allied Countries in Great Britain as providing a nucleus on which an international body could be built up; such a body would certainly facilitate the fundamental educational work, from the university-level downwards. Other speakers in the debate urged that the Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation should keep to practical tasks really within its compass, and especially the restoration of educational systems, the exchange of students, the supply of adequate numbers of textbooks and of other educational equipment; although it was also recognized that, if the Organisation is to succeed, there are other matters in which the active interest and support not merely of the Ministers of Education but also of other Government departments would be required.

Miss Ellen Wilkinson, Minister of Education, replying to the debate, promised that a summary or report of the first general conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation would be issued, either as a White Paper or a Ministry pamphlet. She accepted the principle of concentration on certain practical tasks, where it is a question of money and people and things to be done immediately, but she stoutly championed the idea of wide vision and unrestricted intercourse, rather than narrow conceptions of the ultimate functions of the Organisation. Speaking as chairman of the Preparatory Commission, Miss Wilkinson emphasized the importance of the delegations to the Conference being Government delegates with authority and also having wide influence and support in their own countries.

Miss Wilkinson then spoke specifically of the steps being taken to deal with the appalling destruction of all kinds of educational and scientific apparatus. In view of the world shortage of paper, the possibilities of microfilm in remedying the shortage of books are being explored. The needs of the Continent for scientific apparatus and laboratory equipment were surveyed by the Anglo-American Scientific Equipment Mission at the instance of the Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation early this year; it is estimated that material to the value of at least £9 million will be required, chiefly for the smaller and less expensive equipment, to restore the laboratories of the Continent to their pre-war level.

The way in which the Organisation could take over in the scientific and educational world, in the widest sense, the work being done by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration has been discussed. Translations and a central pool of scientific information are other matters to which immediate attention is being given, but Miss Wilkinson urged that such immediate and practical tasks are not necessarily the most important. Much more important is that very difficult task of acting as a clearing house of minds; and in urging this, and showing that unless we can instil into the minds of youth standards of value, the sense of a difference between right and wrong, and the conviction that intellectual needs are not mere luxuries, the Minister of Education was in harmony with the whole trend of the debate in the House of Lords.

The Minister's speech is somewhat reassuring, for many have been not unreasonably disturbed at the mass of items with which the agenda for the recent conference of the Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation was packed. The value of many of the programmes suggested is undoubted; but their expediency at the present time can be seriously questioned. Not all of those specifically mentioned by the Minister can be regarded as so urgently important as measures to deal with the shortage of books, keenly felt even in British universities and even more on the Continent. Repair and replacement of the buildings, equipment, and libraries of great centres of learning destroyed during the War; the filling of the many gaps in sets of learned periodicals held by research and learned institutions of all kinds throughout the world, on which the research worker depends; and the freeing of scientific publications and of the exchange of students and research workers are the really urgent problems. On the speedy solution of them depends that cross-fertilization of mind, and that wider outlook and fuller understanding across frontiers, out of which must come slowly the thought and purpose which will shape the new political institutions and organs of co-operation needed by the world.

Miss Wilkinson recognized that such practical tasks cost money; it has been estimated that educational relief on the proper scale in Western Europe alone would cost £50,000,000. None the less, no wide discussion of general themes or ideas will avert a feeling of frustration and profound disappointment if the first conference of the Organisation does not result in a real attack, supplied liberally with funds, on educational relief in Europe. The Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation is primarily a piece of machinery, and it will best secure the support of public opinion and avoid the relative futility of the Committee on Intellectual Co-operation if it promotes such practical measures as have been mentioned. The whole trend of the House of Commons debate was behind such a view of the primary activities of the Organisation, and reflected the concern which the listing of seventy projects as of special urgency in the progress report of the Preparatory Commission, as well as the representation on a number of the committees, had engendered. The sense of the debate was quite opposed to the programme of philosophical collaboration outlined in the preparatory report, and on which Dr. Julian Huxley had spoken as a long-range aim. That can only be achieved after the barriers to the exchange of thought and knowledge are removed, and when the contact of mind with mind, and experience in working together in pursuit of common aims, lead to a fresh synthesis and formulation of the values of civilization.

No one could suggest that in the debate there was any desire to prolong or intensify ideological differences: in spite of the insistence on the values of Western civilization, there was just as evident a desire to see Soviet Russia fully associated with the Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, as found expression at the conference last July on the

Organisation and the Universities arranged by the British Association, a report of which has now appeared in *The Advancement of Science* (4, No. 13; 1946). Sir Alfred Zimmern, in his opening address to the conference, rightly affirmed that the Organisation is bound to respect intellectual freedom and the unrestricted pursuit of truth, and that in its dealings with universities and other learned bodies it should avoid anything savouring of an attempt at control. The safeguarding of these values is indeed a major aim of the Organisation, and one in which it can count on the support of universities in every part of the world. But although Sir Alfred went on to discuss the form which co-operation between the universities and the Organisation would assume in practice, as well as that between the Organisation and other international associations such as the Council of Scientific Unions, few of the other speakers at the conference appear to have kept the discussion at a severely practical level.

The fact that the conference was also considering the report of the British Association's Committee on Post-War University Education may be partly responsible for this. Discussion was thereby drawn into a debate between two schools of thought: those who hold, like Mr. Bruce Truscot, that the purpose of universities is both the advancement and dissemination of knowledge, and those who, like Senor Ortega y Gasset, reject the research function and maintain that universities exist for the maintenance and propagation of broad cultural values and for the creation of an educated *élite*. We need, indeed, as Prof. Dobrée said, a far larger number of men and women, of university training, able to grasp ideas and aware of the conditions upon which our highly complex life is lived. Fuller and closer contacts between the universities in Great Britain and in other countries may well assist the development of new and more effective means of raising the general educational level and making international co-operation easier. But at the moment that task is surely second to that of getting the educational systems of Europe going again and repairing the havoc of war. Generous tribute was indeed paid by Prof. Jean Timmermans and others to the work of the Minister of Education and of the Association of University Professors and Lecturers of Allied Countries in Great Britain, the forerunner of the International Association; but little was said about the urgency of immediate educational reconstruction in Europe.

To compare the published report of the conference for the establishment of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation held in London in November 1945 with the programme which was presented to the Preparatory Commission in July (cf. *Nature*, August 31, p. 298) is to realize that there is some solid foundation for the belief that the priorities have been changed. It is true that there is no less emphasis laid on the importance of promoting increased co-operation and contact between philosophers, men of science, humanists, historians and others, and of the free and unrestricted exchange of ideas and knowledge, to the value of which both the Prime Minister and Miss Wilkinson testified at that

conference, and which found expression in particular in the resolution concerning plans for a working arrangement between the Organisation and the International Council of Scientific Unions. The task of restoring and extending the means through which men of science of all lands may exchange information and work together for the advancement of knowledge and for its application to human needs is still recognized as urgent; but one misses in the later programme the sense of urgency, apparent, for example, in the instrument establishing the Preparatory Commission, which charged the Commission to appoint a special technical sub-committee to examine the problems relating to the educational, scientific and cultural needs of the countries devastated by the War, with a pointed reference to immediate action.

The original conference was fully aware of the urgency of such immediate practical problems, and was not anxious to establish fresh bodies. On the contrary, many speeches indicated the desire to build on, and to develop, existing institutions wherever possible. If, therefore, enthusiasm for the immense contribution which the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation can make ultimately by promoting intelligent co-operation throughout the world, at all levels, seems to have led the Preparatory Commission rather astray from some of the more limited, immediately practicable objectives, there is reason for hope that the Paris Conference has redressed the balance. It may be found, when the promised report appears, that ideals and long-term policy have been harmonized with an immediate practical programme directed to assist the reconstruction of European educational systems. Outside the Organisation itself, indeed, support is already forthcoming for practical measures—the recent appropriation to the Organisation from the American Chemical Society for promoting the exchange of chemists and chemical engineers between different countries is one example—and it will be noted that the reconstruction of education in Europe was indeed placed first by the Preparatory Commission on its list of programmes. It is from the demonstration of its ability to minister to these imperative practical needs that the Organisation will draw the public support and understanding necessary for the formulation and execution of wider and more far-reaching plans for bringing the nations together in cultural and intellectual co-operation, and focusing the full force of human intelligence on the task of forging a peaceful co-operative community.

These immediate tasks are in fact but the stepping-stones from which the Organisation should move forward to develop and increase the means of communication between its members, to foster the unrestricted pursuit of truth and the free exchange of thought out of which may ultimately develop something of a world community, and the creative thought which will shape the appropriate instruments of world order to serve the needs of modern society. Neither education nor research can, however, be unifying forces in the world, until these first steps have been taken, and on them our attention should for the moment be focused.