

ticular, he asked that "universities must accept that they have a role to provide their students with a bread ticket". The idea is that universities should be less like "ivory towers" and more concerned with the careers of their graduates. Because of the danger that Mr Hughes's message will become the popular interpretation of what seems to be a temporary surplus of graduates, and because this may in turn lead to a misapprehension of what universities are for, it is important that his heresy should be recognized for what it is.

To begin with, it is difficult to be overwhelmed by the plight of 2,500 graduates when 800,000 other people, the vast proportion of them with family responsibilities, are unemployed in Britain. Indeed, when it appears that more than three per cent of the entire British work force is out of work, graduates with a strong sense of proportion may think it lucky that the proportion of last year's graduates still unable to find a suitable job is no greater. Evidently graduates are still more able than unskilled workers to find a niche for themselves in the British economy. The difficulty, given the economic circumstances of the present, is therefore not the immediate problem of unemployment but the question whether there is now likely to be a permanent imbalance between the output of the universities and the demand for labour of the traditional employers of university graduates. It is only fair to acknowledge that in present circumstances the truth must be exceedingly obscure. It is well known that in times of economic difficulty, the mobility of professional people is diminished. Where graduates are concerned, for example, what this implies is that there are fewer vacant places in professions such as the law or chemical engineering because fewer lawyers have spread their wings into other professions or fewer chemical engineers have found themselves snatched away to become tycoons. This shortage of openings could easily be a temporary recession, and could be followed in a year or so by as clamorous a demand for graduates as any to have gladdened the hearts of appointments officers in the past few years. In other words, a part of the present depression of the graduate labour market is a marginal phenomenon, not a permanency.

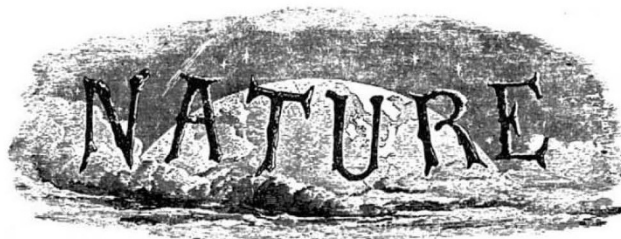
It is also likely, however, that some part of the present difficulty of finding jobs for graduates is linked with the way in which the scale of higher education in Britain has grown in the past two decades more rapidly than the national economy. Since the early fifties, university education in particular, and higher education as a whole, has been growing at such a pace that the output of the universities has multiplied by four in two decades. It is beyond belief that such an expansion could be accomplished without qualitative changes in the character of the labour market. In particular, it is no longer reasonable to expect that the proportions of graduates ending up as teachers should be as great as in the forties or fifties. Indeed, a large part of the incentive for increasing the whole scale of the operation has been the desire to broaden the uses to which advanced education could be put. For decades, British industrialists have been saying that the British economy would be only thoroughly competitive with, say, the German economy when it became possible for technicians in British factories, like those elsewhere, to be proud of having some kind of degree. This, of course, is the case of Mr Heighway. The plain truth is that in terms of the labour market, what is wrong with the output of graduates from the universities in

Britain is not the number of educated people being produced but the conservatism that supposes that higher education in the 1970s must serve exactly the purposes to which higher education in the thirties was put.

What are the implications for the universities? Mr Mark Hughes was, of course, entirely wrong in suggesting that when the need for a greater diversity of occupations for graduates should be encouraged, universities themselves should seek to provide their graduates with training that enables them more effectively to compete for particular kinds of jobs. The argument should be turned the other way, and when it is increasingly necessary for graduates to look for diverse occupations, universities should be more anxious than ever to train them to be flexible. Paradoxically, in other words, the new circumstances which have caused such consternation among universities and their graduates should be regarded not as a spur to more specialized education but the opposite, yet another indication that British higher education has become too detached from the old-fashioned belief that education is worth having for its own sake.

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## 100 Years Ago



### THE PEOPLE'S UNIVERSITY

A GIGANTIC and imposing educational scheme is about to be launched, which, whether it proves feasible or not, must attract the attention and enlist the sympathy of all well-wishers to the intellectual development and material welfare of the country. This is no less an idea than the establishment of a National Working Men's University, which is to be founded with special reference to instruction in those subjects which have a direct bearing on the arts and manufactures. That our workmen are, as a rule, altogether ignorant of the scientific principles upon which the processes they ought to guide and govern are dependent, and that England in this respect stands in a much inferior position to continental nations, is now a well-recognized fact. The result of this lamentable ignorance is stated by certain authorities to be severely felt in those of our trades and manufactures in which we have to compete with other nations; and although this conclusion has been denied by many, yet concerning the necessity for scientific education amongst our artisans there has never been a difference of opinion. The question then arises, How are we to bring to our rising artisans on an extended and national scale the knowledge of scientific principles which they so much need, and for which the best of their class show so much desire and even aptitude? One solution to this problem is being attempted by the scheme of a National University for Industrial and Technical Training. The proposal is to establish a metropolitan institution in which complete and thorough instruction in all those branches of knowledge which are of importance to our manufacturing industry shall be given.

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