

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
OTTAWA - CANADA

THE COMMONWEALTH SCHOLARSHIP PLAN

59/25

Excerpts from a speech delivered to the opening session of the Commonwealth Education Conference, which met at Oxford from July 15 - 29, 1959, by Mr. George Drew, Canadian High Commissioner to the United Kingdom and Leader of the Canadian Delegation to the Conference.

... We are meeting here today pursuant to the decision at the Conference held in Montreal last September to explore the possibility of increased co-operation in the field of education generally, so that there might be wider understanding within the Commonwealth and greater opportunities in the less-developed areas, through the granting of scholarships, the training and supply of teachers, and an exchange of technical and educational knowledge.

At that time Canada put forward a proposal for a programme of Commonwealth scholarships and fellowships, which was approved by the Montreal Conference, which it will be the purpose of this Conference to put into definite form. It was decided "to review existing arrangements for the co-operation between Commonwealth countries in the field of education". While it was stated that this was with particular reference to the supply and training of teachers and the facilities for technical and scientific education, no limit was placed upon the breadth of the examination of the exchange of information and the improvement of the standards of education in all fields.

I do not intend to go into detail as to the nature and operation of a plan for Commonwealth scholarships and fellowships. This can best be done in the Committee which will be set up for that particular purpose. I do think, however, that it might be appropriate for me to outline some of the elements of such a plan which the Canadian Government would wish to have considered in seeking a mutually satisfactory arrangement.

At Montreal it was decided that the scholarship and fellowship programme should provide for the exchange of one thousand scholars who would have an opportunity to study in countries other than their own. Canada undertook to be responsible

for one-quarter of these and, with great generosity, the United Kingdom undertook to be responsible for one-half. The formal commitments necessary to bring this plan into effect may therefore be regarded as already assured, and we proceed from that point.

Canada's Views

In support of its proposal for a Commonwealth scholarship plan at Montreal, the Canadian Government put forward certain basic considerations. Broadly speaking, it was made clear that the plan should supplement the various programmes already operating within and outside the Commonwealth for the purpose of providing technical assistance to less-developed countries. These programmes are designed primarily to advance the knowledge, techniques and skill required for economic advancement and development. But as was stated at the Conference in Montreal, "development brings with it an ever increasing need for people equipped with general training to serve all the elaborate and varied processes of a complex society". The Conference was thus dedicated to a broad concept of education.

In their support of the Canadian proposal, so generously expressed in their commitment to assume the responsibility for one-half of all the scholarships and fellowships, the United Kingdom representatives at Montreal also stressed the point that while the purpose of such a plan might be directed mainly to technical and economic needs, the broader aspects of education should always be borne in mind. This was the opinion apparently supported by all at the earlier conference.

The plan for scholarships and fellowships should not be regarded as one designed simply for the purpose of opening new opportunities to scholars of the less-developed parts of the Commonwealth. Naturally it is our desire that such opportunities be made available on the widest possible scale, but we regard this as a reciprocal plan through which selected young men and women from every part of the Commonwealth will gain a better understanding of the life, culture and institutions of other countries in the Commonwealth. We believe that we Canadians shall gain no less than the smaller and newer members of the Commonwealth if our young scholars are able to increase their knowledge and understanding of the wider problems and aspirations within the Commonwealth through the operation of such a programme.

Aim of Programme

In the discussions which have preceded this Conference, the representatives of our different Canadian universities have emphasized the value they attach to the opportunity this would afford to create within Canada a pool of well-trained brains capable of expressing themselves with knowledge and conviction in regard to the educational and other problems of fellow members of the Commonwealth.

The cumulative effect of such a reciprocal programme, carried on effectively for a number of years, would be that every question which might arise in another part of the Commonwealth could be discussed with sympathy, knowledge and understanding by someone in the other countries of the Commonwealth, who could interpret the special background and historic considerations which should be borne in mind in seeking to build a wider basis of co-operation and advancement. This would produce results of enormous advantage to everyone.

Scope of Plan

It is possible that the importance of such a scholarship and fellowship plan may be obscured by reference to the numbers of students already seeking education outside their own countries. At present there are about thirty thousand students studying in Commonwealth countries other than their own. At first glance this might suggest that the new plan is somewhat limited in its scope. I hope there will be no misapprehension on this score. The plan will provide great possibilities of creating a better understanding within the Commonwealth and a strong foundation for co-operation in all fields of activity in the years to come. Most of those students now studying outside their own countries pay their tuition fees in the ordinary way. There are also a number of very generous scholarship arrangements. However, many of the countries which can gain most from such an exchange, are not able to send their young people to universities in the other countries and this valuable exchange of students, admirable though it may be, does not in most cases conform to the ideas of reciprocal exchange of studies and information to which we attach such great importance.

I should also emphasize that there is no thought of limiting the scope of co-operation and exchange of trained personnel to the numbers embraced in this scholarship plan. Already technical and other assistance is being provided with no relationship to any such plan. Programmes are now in operation under the Colombo Plan which not only assure the carrying out of specific development and construction projects but also furnish in themselves technical training to those living in the area where the work is carried out. The supply and training of teachers and of scientific and technical personnel, as well as the provision of equipment needed by less-developed members of the Commonwealth to create their own scientific and technical training centres, will be covered by the Colombo Plan and other voluntary co-operative programmes without reference to this scholarship plan and will be in no way limited by that plan.

It is not possible to state in advance what proportion of our human and material resources can be devoted to these purposes. However, I do assure you that we in Canada will at all times co-operate to the utmost of our ability in this field and seek to make available in every way we can any special advantage we may possess. At the same time, we shall hope to gain experience, understanding and a wider knowledge of other parts of the Commonwealth through these very activities. The exchange of ideas

will in itself be one of the most valuable result of these efforts.

I have mentioned these other activities because I thought it wise to emphasize that while we attach considerable importance to the scholarship plan, this will not be substituted for the other very substantial programmes now under way or contemplated. It has a particular meaning and its purpose is not only to increase the opportunities for education but also to increase and expand understanding and good will throughout the whole Commonwealth.

As I said before, I have carefully refrained from putting forward any details of the way in which such a scholarship plan can be set up and can operate most effectively. I am sure that the delegations meeting here today already have definite opinions which they wish to exchange. I do not believe that it would be helpful if I attempted to anticipate the work which the committees will do.

Meaning of Education

Having expressed our hopes about the scope and possibilities of a scholarship plan and wider co-operation in other fields, I hope I may be permitted to express some personal opinions about these vitally important subjects. First may I say that I think it is no good to give our young people a smattering of culture, if they are going to go hungry. For that reason I think there must be a very real emphasis on the practical aspects of education and the opportunities to put that education to work after it has been acquired. I am equally strong in my belief, however, that it is not much better to provide our young people with the ability to earn their daily bread, and to become economically independent, if we have not taught them how to live. As this is the first Commonwealth Education Conference held in our thirty years and the first ever to be attended by several of the nations represented here today, I do hope that this dual aspect of our educational problem will be constantly on our minds. I think it would be most unfortunate if this Conference should by any chance appear to be more concerned with the cold statistics involved in the allocation and financial support of scholars, or the training and supply of teachers, than with the purpose, content and meaning of the word "Education", which will be used so frequently during the next two weeks.

All too often we use the word "Education" when we are in fact thinking of the technique of instruction. It must be possible for us to define in simple and understandable terms the aims and objects of the kind of education which we believe will not only improve the social and economic standards of all the people within the Commonwealth, but will also contribute to a better and higher standard of life itself.

Within this vast Commonwealth of ours, we embrace almost every known faith and creed. But this creates no barrier between any of us, when we seek to define the aim and content of education within a free society. Through the religious faith to which each one of us adheres, we seek our own spiritual salvation, but surely we must agree that if the use of the word "Education" is to have any meaning we should be able to declare its purpose within the Commonwealth:

"Holding no form of creed,
But contemplating all".

To have all the examples of the past from which to draw is a storehouse of immense value. There was the teaching for religious office in the ancient civilizations of Asia, the Middle East and Egypt. There was the stern discipline of Sparta. There was the great period of education in Athens during the golden days of Greece. We can look back upon the steady growth of education and of culture in Europe. All these, including the firm growth of education here in Britain and throughout the Commonwealth, suggest alternatives and indicate the course which we should follow. Nor should we forget the straitjacket within which education has been confined in the dictatorships which have emerged in recent years.

Our plans, it seems to me, should be an expression of our belief in freedom. While governments must of necessity play their necessary and important role in working out the details of any plans formulated and approved by this Conference, the ultimate responsibility for their operation and their success will, of necessity, rest mainly upon our universities. As we seek an answer to this fundamental question, "what do we mean by Education?", I venture to suggest that all universities today should ask themselves three questions.

- (1) Is not the most important problem for the world today a moral and a spiritual one? On the material side we are doing very well and we shall do still better and expand it. Our real weakness and the real division between the totalitarian state and the free society lies in the other field.
- (2) What are the universities going to do to cure this weakness, whose existence they cannot possibly deny?
- (3) Having regard to the fact that our future will be so largely shaped by the thoughts implanted in the universities, ought anyone to be allowed to pass through a university without thinking about this problem? Can we ignore what Plato called "the noblest of all studies - the study of what a man should be and how he should live"?

Certainly there are no easy answers to these questions. But are the answers so difficult as we sometimes seem to think?

If our universities really regarded this as an urgent and serious problem, it could be solved tomorrow. We are dealing with far more complex questions in the mysterious realm of nuclear physics. People who have unlocked the mysteries of the universe by their combined thought and action surely need not be dismayed by this relatively simple task. I most earnestly hope that this Conference will formulate a declaration setting forth, in clear and simple words, the ethical and practical concepts of education within the Commonwealth which we are prepared to support.

Let us make plans, whatever they may be, worthy of the great challenge with which we are confronted and equal to the immense opportunities that now open out before us. Let us make no small plans. They hold no magic to stir the hearts and minds of men.

We can produce nothing more valuable at this Conference than a clear statement of our aims and objects in words which will give life, vitality and increasing strength to the system of education which we seek to encourage throughout the whole Commonwealth.

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