THE SOCIAL CREDITER

FOR POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC REALISM

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The Report of the Robbins Committee on Higher Education*

The Robbins Report, as it is usually called, consists of a main volume of over three hundred pages and there are five appendices in six volumes: it is therefore impossible to deal with all of it in a short article. This is also unnecessary because, although the Report contains a good deal that does concern us, much of it either lies outside our province or is of a nature on which we should not wish to comment. Thus there are sections on such subjects as the present structure of higher education in this country, comparisons with that in some other countries, the probable demand for higher education in Great Britain up to 1980 and the extent to which it should be met. This is followed by an examination of the relationship between higher education and the schools, the work of existing institutions of higher education and suggestions for the future. Then there are problems of staffing, teaching and finance and of the internal government of institutions, and finally a chapter on immediate problems and a summary of conclusions. In order to form their conclusions the authors have consulted a very large number of institutions and persons with expert knowledge; consequently the Report has commanded wide approval and has received the Government's blessing.

Naturally there has also been considerable comment and criticism from prominent people. For instance, there has been much debate as to whether there should be a new and separate Ministry for higher education or whether there should be one Minister responsible for education as a whole with two subsidiary ministers responsible to him, one for higher education and one for the schools. Other proposed arrangements have also been criticised but many of the Report's pronouncements are beyond dispute. Nobody disputes the assertion that higher education should be accessible to as many young people as are prepared for it and desire it. Also everybody recognises that the demand for higher education is likely to increase considerably and the authors of the Report claim that, on this score, their estimates are conservative rather than otherwise and that the same applies to their financial estimates.

In a letter to *The Times*, Dr. N. G. Annan, the Provost of King's College, Cambridge, indicates that University Dons were well aware that provision must be made for more students. He welcomes proposals in the Report regarding closer affiliation of teachers' training colleges (to be called Colleges of Education) to universities, the raising of Colleges of Advanced Technology to university status and for greater support for training in engineering. In general, he concludes that the Report will help to increase variety rather than destroy it. It will also compel universities to review their arrangements. But he is not happy about the recommendations regarding Oxford and Cambridge since he feels that the Report shows a certain "stinginess" towards the great laboratories and facilities of these Universities. The authors of the Report certainly look with a jaundiced eye at the disproportionate numbers of students at these two Universities who come from "independent" schools and propose that the relative attractiveness of Oxford and Cambridge should be diminished by the deliberate development and "appropriate support" of other universities. So long as this is a levelling up instead of a levelling down, as Dr. Annan possibly fears, this may be justified. Dr. Annan is certainly more human in his approach to the academic performance of students than his colleague the Master of Sidney Sussex College who has little use for those who only achieve 3rd class standards. Dr. Annan points out that some students spend a good deal of time on music, arts, politics, games and other social activities and may even fall in love. Many of them are clever and able enough but prefer to use their talents in other things while doing the minimum to defeat the examiners. "If the country were to follow Dr. Thompson's (the Master of S. Sussex) principles, some of the present ministers of the Crown and many others who in later life have shown even greater ability would never have been allowed near a university." Apart from this which looks like a defence of amateurs and of people whose interests stray outside a cut-and-dried curriculum, I have only come across one criticism of special interest from our point of view. This was from the Editor of *The Music Magazine* (December 1963), who wrote: "The world of the future will not demand many hours of labour from its workers. There will be more leisure . . ." And what will the workers do then, poor things? He thought that was where the arts come in: "music and all the other arts that give outlet for creation and appreciation"—and it is just these arts that lie outside the terms of reference of the Report.†

It is with questions of principle and with those like the one just mentioned that we are chiefly concerned; indeed one can hardly find words strong enough to condemn a Report which

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* To review the pattern of full-time higher education in Great Britain and in the light of national needs and resources to advise H.M. Government on what principles its long-term development should be based. In particular to advise, in the light of these principles, whether there should be any changes in that pattern, whether any new types of institution are desirable and whether any modifications should be made in the present arrangements for planning and co-ordinating the development of the various types of institution.

† The Committee did not deal with the work of independent colleges of theology, music, art, architecture, military colleges, nursing and some of the occupations associated with medicine—but some statistics on these subjects are in Appendix Two.

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Gangsters

"There is sufficient evidence available to make it certain that an international group exists which is completely indifferent to any national interest. I believe most of the reptiles who compose this group would poison their own mothers if their schemes were thereby advanced. To them, nations, peoples and races are pieces on a chessboard, and the Hitlers, Mussolinis, Baldwins and Chamberlains are normally regarded as merely agencies by means of which, either in part or whole, the pawns are made to obey the will of the pawnbrokers."

—C. H. Douglas. (Extract from "Are We Awake?" *T.S.C.*, Vol. 1, No. 5, 15/10/38.)

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"In this, the gravest crisis of the world's history, it is essential to realise that the stakes which are being played for are so high that the players on one side, at least, care no more for the immolation of the peoples of a continent than for the death of a sparrow."

—C. H. Douglas. (Extract from "Russia's Ultimate Aims". *T.S.C.*, 10/2/45.)

The Paul Report: An Impression

The Bishop of Woolwich welcomes the Paul Report on the future organisation of the Church of England, but regrets that it is not more "radical", according to *The Daily Telegraph* report (5/2/64).

Mr. Paul recommends, among other reforms, the abolition of private patronage and of the parson's freehold. At first glance the permanence of parsons and the private nature of some patrons might appear as undesirable survivals from antiquity, yet reflection shows that they preserve a measure of freedom to the incumbent. Freedom for the Anglican Church was a provision of Magna Carta. In the present organisation of this branch of the Church, when the State appoints the chief officials (and there have been some curious appointments) any check to the stranglehold of politics on the Church obviously fulfils the principle of Runnymede.

People usually complain that a parson does not stay five minutes in a parish before he moves, yet the Report calls particular attention to the few who reside for a number of years as if they were a leading problem. A private patron, moreover, may well provide an unusual type of clergyman with a position which no Bishop would offer him, while the freehold gives him a security to live according to his conscience and perhaps to expound views which a Bishop might not like, or to oppose a Bishop of whom he does not approve.

The removal of these safeguards leaves the incumbent exposed as an officer of the State, for the Bishop—who may well be a State's man—alone stands between him and official policy; and who knows that an unofficial Minister of Cults might not arise to keep the Bishops in order, if they refused to take action against a recalcitrant incumbent?

I quite realise that change proceeds from nature, but an imposed and sudden change differs from the natural process, and very often such violent changes produce different results from those advertised. Violent changes normally involve the loss of freedom. Dr. Beeching's report produces considerable changes, but the railways deal with a separate part of life. The financial efficiency which, according to their set of rules, is demanded of the railways, bears no comparison to the spiritual efficiency required of the Church.

Other organisations—Roman Catholic, Methodist and the rest—doubtless have much to teach the Anglican Church, but our arrangement has given a place to the exceptional and demands an *unshared responsibility*. This responsibility has not always been abused. Inflation has, of course, cut most of the ground from under the parson's feet and I'm afraid that abolishing these safeguards will not ultimately compensate for a larger stipend. Removing a concrete liberty, even from a smallish number of men, leaves the country poorer.

I need hardly add that the B.B.C.'s "Panorama" television programme gave a grossly exaggerated view of the present position by showing the viewers some extreme cases—one man with a very small parish and another with a gigantic cure. But although anomalies always appear, this does not mean they cannot be mended without transferring all advowsons (rights of presentation to a living) to the Bishop—who often advises in any case—and without changing the status of all incumbents.

The priest occupies the middle position in the three estates of the Church, bishops, priests and people, and the position was sound as long as he had security. Clearly to weaken the position of one of the estates is to increase the power of the other two. An oasis of freedom incurs unpopularity in "socialist" times because it threatens centralised power and gives scope to individual initiative, so I feel sure that it ought to be guarded.

—H.S.S.

THE REPORT OF THE ROBBINS COMMITTEE

(continued from page 1)

contains no hint of the necessity of provision for the leisure which accumulated scientific and technological advances has already made possible and will make still more possible as time goes on. Instead of this, the Report simply accepts the present industrial and military "rat race" as a permanent condition of society: all its provisions are designed to accentuate its intensity. Thus, it has many passages like the following:— "Unless higher education is speedily reformed . . . . there is little hope of this densely populated island maintaining its position in the fiercely competitive world of the future", and again, "Progress—and particularly the maintenance of a competitive position—depends to a much greater extent than ever before on skills demanding a special training".

The authors of the Report complain that, hitherto, there has not been a system: higher education, like Topsy, has just growed. "This," they say, "is not good enough: it must henceforth be planned to serve the interests of the nation." But, of course, "the organisation of higher education must allow for free development of institutions" which "must be free to experiment without pre-determined limitations except those necessary to safeguard their essential functions. . . . Our fundamental postulate of system and order is not to be in any way construed as conflicting with this. . . . We ask that there should be co-ordination, some principles of policy commonly accepted, some organisation providing for the rational allocation of scarce resources." (If, by these, they mean great libraries, very expensive and complicated apparatus and the like, nobody will quarrel with them.) They continue: "We should hold it to be the very bankruptcy of constitutional invention if such conditions are thought to be incompatible with that scope for individual and institutional initiative that British tradition has always held to be one of the main essentials of intellectual and spiritual health." (This depends on what they mean by "essential functions" and "the interests of the nation".)

In comparing the position of British institutions with that of many institutions of higher education abroad "with their syllabuses, their appointments and their expenditure all subject to immediate and sometimes detailed control by the state", the Report states that "this is certainly not a position of academic freedom in the sense in which it is understood here". While not denying the quality of much of the work done abroad the authors believe that "a system which aims at the maximum of independence, compatible with the necessary degree of public control, is good in itself as reflecting the ultimate values of a free society." They also believe that a multiplicity of centres of initiative (provided that there is co-ordination and the necessary degree of public control) "safeguards spontaneity and variety and therefore provides the surest guarantee of intellectual progress and moral responsibility." They do not regard such freedom as "a privilege but as a necessary condition". They also believe that universities should retain freedom to appoint their staff and that the habit of appointing external examiners together with "the obvious incentive to maintain public esteem" are sufficient safeguards for keeping the institutions up to scratch.

These assurances could perhaps be said to culminate in the following pasages:— "The aim should be to produce not mere specialists but rather cultivated men and women" and "Education ministers intimately to ultimate ends in developing man's capacity to understand, to contemplate and to create. And it is a characteristic of the aspirations of this age to feel that where there is the capacity to pursue such activities, there that capacity should be fostered. The good society desires equality of opportunity for its free citizens to become not merely good producers but also good men and women."

The average local magnate at a school speech-day could not have done better. But the Committee is trying to reconcile incompatibles—to serve God and Mammon. How can students harassed (sometimes to the point of suicide) by examinations on the results of which so much of their future may depend find time for contemplation? For contemplation there must be some leisure and freedom from anxiety. Besides, as Oscar Wilde wrote long before things had reached their present pitch: "Society often forgives the criminal; it never forgives the dreamer . . . in the opinion of society contemplation is the gravest sin of which any citizen can be guilty, although in the opinion of the highest culture it is the proper occupation of man". Wilde also wrote: "Civilisation needs slaves . . . unless there are slaves to do the ugly, horrible, uninteresting work, culture and contemplation become almost impossible. Human slavery is wrong, insecure and demoralising. On mechanical slavery, on the slavery of the machine, the future of the world depends. . . . At present machinery competes against man. Under proper conditions machinery will serve man. . . . The machines will be the new slaves."

By his use of both words Wilde would appear to distinguish between civilisation and culture. S. T. Coleridge also made this distinction; he wrote: "The permanency of the nation . . . and its progressiveness and personal freedom depend on a continuing and progressive civilisation. But civilisation is itself a mixed good, if not far more a corrupting influence—the hectic of disease, not the bloom of health—and a nation so distinguished is more fit to be called a varnished than a polished people where this civilisation is not grounded in cultivation (culture), in the harmonious development of those qualities and faculties that characterise humanity". And again, "Only by the vital warmth diffused by these truths (of religion) throughout the many, and by the guiding light of the philosophy which is the basis of divinity possessed by the few, can either the community or its rulers fully comprehend or rightly appreciate the permanent distinction and the occasional contrast between cultivation and civilisation . . . that a nation can never be a too cultivated but may easily become an over-civilised race."

The Robbins Committee had a great opportunity. They were given the chance to recommend for our approval an educational system orientated towards the future of almost unimaginable splendour and comfort which some of our writers and statesmen, including Churchill, have glimpsed. Had they done so the rest of the world, after experiencing two great wars, might have taken note of something worth copying. Instead they have asked us to prepare our young people for a world of ever fiercer industrial competition with all the accompanying bitter fruits with which we are so familiar. In short, as indicated earlier, they accept the world as it is and merely extrapolate present trends.

But could we have expected anything better from a Committee presided over by one of the chorus of economists who

did their utmost to discredit and belittle the work of C. H. Douglas? In 1931 Professor Lionel Robbins, as he was then, read a paper before the British Association for the Advancement of Science entitled "Consumption and the Trade Cycle" which contains passages so far from the truth that one wonders whether he really believed them himself. Speaking of the deficiency of purchasing power he accused Douglas of merely wishing to make this up by a continuous issue of paper money; then, after a grotesque argument about the A+B theorem in which he postulates a stationary system, leaves out the time-factor and assumes that there will be no savings, he states: "It is perfectly true, as Major Douglas urges, that the sums distributed as ultimate incomes—wages, salaries, rents, etc.—are insufficient to purchase the gross product of industry. *But so far from this being a cause of industrial crisis, it is in fact an essential condition of the smooth functioning of the economic system.*" (His own emphasis—and this in the 1930s.) Later in his paper he argued "not only is there no reason to attribute industrial depression to a deficiency of consumption, but also there is on the contrary, considerable reason to believe that the coming depression" (most of us thought it had arrived) "is due to the fact that consumption has become too high" (with about 3,000,000 unemployed!) "for capital extensions already embarked upon to be profitably carried through. . . . Recent investigations seem to make it more and more probable that booms are due to forced saving brought about by inflation of credits; and that the collapse of the boom is due to the exhaustion of this process. It is truer to say that the depression comes because consumption is too urgent than because it is not urgent enough. *We do not starve in the midst of plenty because we do not demand enough; we starve because, having forced the tree of prosperity, we seek to pluck its fruits before they are ripe.*"

After this last emphasised gem we know why Professor Robbins got where he is and also where the rhetoric in the Report comes from. We are also prepared for the remarkable assertion in the chapter on the Financial and Economic Aspects of Higher Education in the Report that the Real Cost of any project is not as Douglas showed, what is consumed while it is being carried out but what has to be*foregone* in order to carry it out. Hence, according to the Robbins Report, "The Real Cost of Higher Education is what could have been produced or enjoyed had the means involved—the use of buildings and materials, services of staff and students—been available for other purposes." Fortunately the Committee recognised that it was impossible to arrive at a figure representing this and decided to adopt ordinary accounting methods. In fact, to give them their due, they even recognised that Higher Education can increase the value of "human capital" although they make no suggestion that this increase might be set against the expenditure incurred. They would have been justified in doing so: the game should at least be worth the candle.

The whole question of public expenditure is accepted without question and is made the pretext for public control. And here one can, of course, sympathise with the Committee because, had it suggested that, in view of the vast economic potential of this day and age, private incomes ought to have increased likewise so that people could pay for all kinds of education, they would have been laughed out of court and their Report would have been torn to pieces. Yet Dr. Rudolf Steiner, who was one of the most original, if unorthodox, educationalists of this century, saw and deplored the levelling and standardisation which were inevitable in state control of education since they proceeded from the very nature of the state itself. In his remarkable book *The Threefold Commonwealth*, which was quoted favourably by Douglas in another connection, Steiner wrote: "Teachers, artists and others will find that they have an altogether different influence and are able to awaken an understanding amongst the public for what they are creating when they themselves have a place in the social order which has no direct connection with any legislature or government . . . when, too, they are appealing to people who are not simply under compulsion to labour, but for whom an autonomous and independent political state also ensures the right to leisure—leisure which awakens the mind to an appreciation of spiritual values. Here one will be told by someone that his own 'practical experience'—of which he has a great opinion—convinces him that if this notion was carried out—if the state made definite provision for leisure hours and if school attendance were left to people's own sense it would simply mean that people would spend all their time in the public house and relapse into a state of brute ignorance. Well, let such pessimists wait and see what will happen when the world is no longer under their influence . . . they know the spiritual life in bondage only, and so it has no power to kindle any spark within themselves."

Major Douglas once said that he thought that Steiner's works had suffered a good deal from translation into English, but at any rate, this passage seems plain enough, and many of us will say "speed the day".

—T.N.M.

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