

OPENING ADDRESS

Mr. A.G. Tasker, Commonwealth Assistant Secretary-General

First let me say how delighted I am to be able to welcome you on behalf of the Secretary-General, Mr. Shridath Ramphal, to this meeting in Marlborough House to discuss ways and means of improving training opportunities in the field of industry and technology. As you may already be aware, Mr. Ramphal is in the Caribbean at present on other urgent responsibilities, but I know he would have wished to be here with us, if it had been possible.

Economic Setting

The subject which we have invited you to assist us in examining is one which has concerned many of you over the years in your individual and official capacities, and which has engaged the attention of many previous Commonwealth conferences and seminars. The promotion of development in member states as part of a world community seeking a more just and equitable human society is clearly an important preoccupation of the Commonwealth. In this connection it is recognized that the re-location of some industries as well as the development of new industries in the developing countries is an essential element in promoting the new international economic order, and one which is in the long-term interest of both developing and developed countries alike. It is against this background that the idea of the transfer of technology and management expertise between the more developed and the less developed countries of the Commonwealth must be seen as part of a movement which satisfies the needs of the developing countries for access to technology on self-respecting terms, as well as one which ensures the growth within their countries of a capacity to generate a technology suited to their needs and stages of development.

As the Secretary-General said, speaking at the seminar in Regina University in 1976 on the potential of Commonwealth co-operation in such an expertise:

We must recognize the potential that exists within the Commonwealth for enlarging the technological capability of the developing countries. In saying this I do not mean that the Commonwealth should aim, in any manner, at becoming a closed shop developing programmes exclusive to itself. Equally, however, we should not under-estimate our capacity for promoting, within the Commonwealth, dynamic programmes which harness our inherent potential for co-operation and provide valuable models and guidelines to the rest of the world. The Commonwealth has provided important leads to the rest of the world in other spheres of endeavour. It would be particularly fitting that it should point the way for world action that truly helps the developing countries to achieve and sustain a capability for generating self-sustaining growth. The Commonwealth is representative of both the world's capability in the technological field and the world's needs for technology transfers and technological development. How better can we provide new guidelines to the world than by marrying our capability to our needs!

Origins

I am sure that all of you here are familiar with the background to our meeting today, but let us briefly refresh our memories. Over the last ten years many Commonwealth conferences have stressed the need for co-operative efforts in the important area of industrial training and experience, especially practical training in the various aspects of industry, technology and managerial skills. In response to the acute awareness of the shortage of facilities in, or available to, developing countries, for providing such practical experience and training for their technicians and technologists, and stemming from a conference in Ottawa in August/September 1964, a special Commonwealth conference on the education and training of technicians was held at Huddersfield, England, in October 1966. That conference laid emphasis on the priority which should be given by the Commonwealth Secretariat to the training and placement problems which member states were experiencing and continue to experience in their efforts to develop their economies rapidly.

The Conference in Regina in July 1976 examined opportunities for practical work experience in an international context, and I am very glad to welcome to your meeting as observers three of the participants at that conference, led by Dr. Lloyd Barber, President of the University of Regina. We are indeed pleased to have them with us here. A seminar on technical education and industry for Commonwealth countries in the Asia and Pacific regions, which was held in Hong Kong also in 1976, considered, among other things, co-operative programmes of student placement in industry. The Commonwealth Science Council which undertook a survey of the problems of student placement for industrial training in order to ascertain the degree of support among Commonwealth countries for such a programme, established two things above all others: first, it confirmed the urgent need felt by Commonwealth governments for practical training, both at the technician level and for newly qualified graduates of science engineering as a supplement to the formal courses of instruction available in member states; second, it established clearly the existence of the desire of Commonwealth governments to assist each other in providing this additional component of job-specific manpower training that will accelerate manpower development.

As evidence of the wide spectrum of the problem, the Commonwealth Experts Group and the Commonwealth Team of Industrial Specialists have both stressed the need for the transfer not only of new technologies but also of entrepreneurial and other management skills to developing countries, and for interchanges of knowledge and experience between them.

The Seventh Commonwealth Education Ministers' Meeting, held in Accra, Ghana, in March 1977, provided the latest spur to action. That meeting called specifically on the Secretary-General to study proposals for a Commonwealth programme for providing industrial training and experience to be worked out in detail and to be commended to member governments for examination and adoption. It will therefore be clear that the need for this programme as an inter-disciplinary effort has long been recognized.

Existing Arrangements

We are aware that there are in existence, in many of our member states, programmes which provide training and experience on an ad hoc basis. Some of these programmes are on a modest scale, while others involve larger dimensions. What is however indisputable is the great need to examine and define the scope, levels and priorities in this field of industrial and technological training. Such a definition should lead to a more systematic provision within and between member states. It should also improve the relevance of

such training to the needs of the developing countries on the one hand, and on the other hand the benefits which may be derived by the more advanced countries from the transfer of such skills and practical expertise. We in the Secretariat are confident that the Commonwealth is well equipped to devise a means whereby the practical training of students can be effected on a more comprehensive, co-ordinated and beneficial scale than in the past. One of your tasks during this meeting will be to identify the particular fields of special training, the levels of needs, and the priority fields in which such training can be successfully and effectively carried out.

You are no doubt aware of various examples of such development programmes directed towards co-operation among Commonwealth countries. I refer, for example, to the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation and to the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan, both of which are already playing a major role in Commonwealth development. You have before you, as an information document, a description of the nature and scope of the CFTC, which is essentially a programme of mutual self-help in which the recipient countries are also donor countries. More than one quarter of the resources available to the Fund are contributed by the developing countries; for example, Nigeria is the fourth largest contributor after Canada, Britain and Australia. Nearly one half of the CFTC experts in the field come from developing nations, and the Fund supplements opportunities for training under bilateral programmes in the industrialized countries by concentrating its own programme on training people from developing countries in other developing countries. But the resources of the CFTC are clearly inadequate for the kind of industrial training programme which we have in mind, taking note of the needs of Commonwealth countries. Even in response to national needs, some of our member states are moving thousands of technicians and technologists from their countries through bilateral and multilateral arrangements in their determination to speed their rate of development. Clearly the capacity of member states to make such arrangements varies from country to country. Yet, if there were a clearly defined and well conceived programme which provided a variety of training facilities at the different levels between the various members of the Commonwealth, the opportunities thus available would surely be used more comprehensively and more effectively than through the present ad hoc bilateral arrangements.

You are also familiar with the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan, which assists formal study at tertiary level institutions through awards provided by member states at both undergraduate and graduate levels. Again, in spite of the success of the Plan, the terms of reference of the CSFP are such that it would not be possible to expand the Plan in order to embrace a comprehensive programme of industrial training and experience. The administrative and financial arrangements of the CSFP may, however, provide a model for those aspects of an industrial training programme.

Existing Constraints

Let me say frankly that we recognize the constraints and problems that are involved in the attempt to develop the kind of scheme that I have described. We know that there are immigration and employment regulations which have the effect of denying even eminently deserving placements; that liaison between government, industry and education authorities is difficult to achieve; that information on training opportunities in industry is frequently lacking; and that the attitude of some governments towards the private sector, where many placements are to be found, may be discouraging or even hostile. We know that some firms are reluctant to provide training for students from "competitor" countries; and that others fear industrial espionage. We know that the machinery of international and bilateral aid is complex, and that

placement of trainees under such auspices is a slow and cumbersome process. We know, too, that some governments, though aware of the need for practical training, cannot obey it because the student is so urgently required to take up a predetermined appointment. And, of course, we know of the all-encompassing need for funds.

In this context, I have read with interest the Macfarlane survey prepared for this meeting. Like him, I am astonished at the range of training facilities available. Like him, I am puzzled as to why, given the urgent needs expressed by developing countries, there are not more nominations for placements under the existing schemes. Is this because, in many developing countries, manpower planning departments are inadequately staffed? Do they lack the expertise to recognize training needs or, when these are identified, to tackle the task of selecting suitable trainees, or locating training resources that will match their needs?

Any programme you may devise will depend on the skills of those who operate it. You may wish, therefore, to consider the types of assistance that could be made available to some of the developing countries to help them operate the programme successfully.

These are among the difficulties that you are enjoined to study, and from your wealth of experience collectively to formulate a programme for the movement of persons which will make it possible to develop, particularly in the less advanced members of the Commonwealth, a technological framework which will generate and accelerate their capacity for self development.

You will be considering ways and means, not only of financing such a Commonwealth programme, but indeed the scope, levels, specific areas and the mechanisms for its operation. We are confident that you will approach your task imaginatively, yet with realism. No doubt you will be considering the question as to whether the expansion of existing programmes through specific pledges made by member states, or the establishment of a completely separate Commonwealth scheme, will provide the surest means for fulfilling the aspirations of member states in this matter. In this task, we place no restrictions on the collective wisdom of your group during the next few days. We trust that there will emerge a clear definition, not only of the areas of need and the priorities of member states in the provision of industrial training and experience, but also the outline of a Commonwealth programme, the nature and requirements of the mechanism, and what facilities may be required for servicing such a programme.

That your task is a complex one is obvious to all of us. Yet, if we are to move to a world of fewer inequalities, and that is perhaps the same as saying a more peaceful world, the need for economic dependence to be minimized between the rich and the poor cannot be questioned; and in this endeavour, a training programme that utilizes the full resources of the Commonwealth in a systematic and substantive manner can make a vital contribution.

Before I close I would like to thank our Chairman, Mr. H.S. Shahani, and to say how fortunate we are that he has agreed to preside over and guide your deliberations for the next few days. I know that he accepted this responsibility at short notice, but he is no stranger to international meetings and his own depth of experience and the collective wisdom of this working group will, I am sure, lead to constructive recommendations.

In conclusion, I wish to assure you that your recommendations will be very carefully studied by the Secretary-General. He attaches, in recognition

of the interest of member states in the subject, a high priority to the development of this programme, and he shares the hope that it will respond in a practical way to the needs which have been so generally and clearly recognized by our member states.

It is now my great pleasure to ask Mr. Shahani to take the chair. I wish all of you frank and fruitful deliberations in the next few days.