

Summing Up

Sir Roy Marshall

Chairman of the Commonwealth Education Liaison Committee

To the task of reflecting upon the work of the Seventh Commonwealth Education Conference, I bring a ripe inexperience, for although I have been engaged in education all my life, this is the first Commonwealth Education Conference I have attended. For this reason I feel somewhat like the seventh husband of the much married Barbara Hutton who on their wedding night is alleged to have said: “Darling, I know what to do; but I am not sure that I can make it interesting”. However that may be, in preparing for the responsibilities you have been good enough to ask me to assume on this occasion, I have looked at the proceedings of the previous conferences and, having reflected upon the themes with which they were concerned, I am struck by the way in which each conference has built upon those that went before it and by the really remarkable record of solid achievement and practical co-operation in education to which those conferences have given rise. I hope therefore that you will permit me to preface my remarks with a brief conspectus of our previous conferences.

The Oxford Conference in 1959 is best remembered for the major initiative it took in establishing the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan, the report of which has demonstrated to this Conference — as it has to all its predecessors — how fundamental the Plan continues to be in promoting co-operation and mutual understanding among the governments and peoples of the Commonwealth. Indeed, there can be no better measure of the importance of the Plan than the recommendation adopted by this Conference that every effort should be made to increase the number of scholarships from 1,000 to 1,500 to be held in any one year and to maintain their value in keeping with rising costs.

Another important result of the Oxford Conference was the decision to treat the training and supply of teachers and the development of technical education as standing items for subsequent discussions. But perhaps the most dynamic result was the creation of a structure to continue and develop the work of co-operation between conferences. In the course of time that structure has grown into the Education Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat; but there still remains a link with the past through the continued existence of the Commonwealth Education Liaison Committee, which is composed of representatives of all the Commonwealth High Commissions in London and of the United Kingdom Government. Among other things, it assists the Education Division in carrying out the recommendations of the previous Conference and in drawing up the agenda and making arrangements for the next.

It is as Chairman of the Commonwealth Education Liaison Committee that I have the privilege of addressing you, and it is in that capacity, as

well as in my own right — that I wish to pay tribute to my predecessor, Professor Lionel Elvin, who made many eloquent and elegant contributions to previous conferences and to the whole ambit of Commonwealth educational development. I am sure that I speak for everyone when I say that few men could have done as much for that cause and none with greater dedication and style.

I shall return to the work of the Division in due course; but for the moment I should like to continue my conspectus of previous Conferences. The New Delhi Conference in 1962 added co-operative action in the provision of textbooks and developed proposals for social education and education in rural communities.

The Ottawa Conference in 1964 looked at the questions of quantity and quality in education in the context of educational self-sufficiency and paid special attention to manpower in education, the development of agricultural education and the eradication of adult illiteracy.

The Lagos Conference of 1968 not only authorized the expansion of the Education Division but dealt with an agenda large enough to make one believe that the expansion had already taken place. The agenda covered the needs of higher education; technical and vocational development; curriculum development; education for social and economic development; book production and library expansion; education and family planning; the role of the mass media; and the contribution of women to national development.

The Canberra Conference in 1971 perceived the importance of the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation in accelerating the pace of educational co-operation; established the Commonwealth Youth Programme; reviewed programmes for the training and supply of educational personnel; reconsidered the problems of curriculum and educational media; and provided new guidelines for out-of-school education and training.

The Jamaica Conference of 1974 dealt with a wide-ranging theme; *The Management of Education — Innovation, Implementation, Consolidation*. In summing up its work, Professor Elvin perceived two changes from previous conferences both of which seem to me to have been underlined at this Conference and to be of on-going and fundamental importance.

Professor Elvin's first point of contrast arose out of the feeling which he experienced for the first time in Jamaica that: "We have all been taking part equally. The First and Third World polarity is getting modulated; at least in the sense that the frequency of interventions of participants bears no relation, as far as I can see, to the size or wealth of the countries they represent. That is as it should be. We are all really working together now. I notice the growth of interchange of experience, to say nothing of persons, between countries of the so-called Third World. I also note that the myth that First World countries have no educational problems has disappeared."

No one can be left in doubt after this Conference that Elvin is right as far as equality of participation is concerned. But there are still differences between the member countries of the Commonwealth — differences of size, of progress on the road to educational advancement, of wealth of resources, and of the make-up of population in terms of differing

percentages of relevant age groups. One of these differences led to a proposal by the Minister from the Seychelles for a meeting of small states to consider their problems and search for solutions. This is a most interesting development, for it cuts across the regional classification that is usually used and focuses attention instead on the problems of particular member states, wherever located, with similar problems at any given time. I sensed that the Seychelles proposal was favoured and I hope that action will be taken in respect of it.

I think that this could be the beginning of a very important line of development. During the proceedings of the Conference there emerged a clear desire on the part of countries which had not yet achieved the goal of universal primary education to have the opportunity to confer among themselves to see what lessons they could offer to — and learn from — each other. And although this was not mentioned at the Conference, I foresee that there could be a case for member countries with similar demographic trends conferring among themselves with a view to finding common answers to their questions. For it is a fact that some countries are moving into a situation of falling birth rates in which the demand for education will fall during the next six or seven years. On the other hand there are countries where an unusually high proportion of their population is under 16 and there is no sign of any easing of pressure on the educational system. I hope that the Secretariat will carry forward these ideas through workshops composed of the appropriate personnel from the participant countries.

My gloss on Elvin's first point of contrast has distracted me from his second which he expressed in these words: "This is the first occasion I remember on which we have said quite explicitly that educational decisions — I do not mean pedagogical ones but decisions of educational policy — must be made in the setting of a country's political and social aims. It is good to get that right." And I have no doubt that in this Conference we have continued to get it right. Indeed, anyone who sat in on the group discussions during this week will have no difficulty in recalling the numerous occasions on which various suggestions have been said by delegates of particular countries to be unrealistic, or impracticable, or politically not possible, or more fundamentally educationally unacceptable, in the context of the aims and needs of those countries.

But I am running ahead of myself, for the Conference began last week with a three-day meeting of officials in the absence of their ministers. In this respect it differed from all previous Conferences where ministers were present throughout. It differed also in that it lasted for ten days only, of which seven were working days, whereas the duration of previous conferences was a fortnight.

I am sure that all of us who have studied the *Working Paper on Commonwealth Co-operation in Education* prepared by the Commonwealth Secretariat will wish to congratulate Dr. Cookey and his colleagues on a monumental piece of work. This paper clearly showed the scope of the Secretariat's contribution to Commonwealth co-operation in education and more than fulfilled the most optimistic expectations of those who succeeded in establishing the structure for such co-operation at the Oxford Conference in 1959. The range of the Secretariat's activities and the scope of the services provided by the officers of the Education Division make it a special pleasure for me on your behalf to pay a warm

tribute to Dr. Cookey and his colleagues for the quality of their work. I should also like to take this opportunity to say to Dr. Cookey how much we appreciate what he has been able to do during his term of office as Director of the Education Division and to extend to him every good wish for the future.

It would be a work of supererogation on my part and a cause of at least a modicum of tedium to you if I went through the contents of the Secretariat's Working Paper *seriatim* and in detail, or of the Report of the Meeting of Officials arising from it, especially as they have already been the subject of close scrutiny in plenary sessions. At the same time, I am sure you will allow me to make just a few observations.

The first is an expression of satisfaction that the country papers have been so greatly appreciated. We have received a record number on this occasion and we are naturally very pleased that they provide the information for which we asked within a framework suggested by the Education Division, yet leaving every country free to emphasize any aspect of its own system in accordance with its own wishes. It is extremely gratifying that Dr. Adiseshiah suggested that they should form the nucleus of a Commonwealth Education Documentation Bureau. We shall be looking into the possibilities of that.

My second observation is one of regret that we have been unable to report at this Conference the holding of a Commonwealth Universities Seminar on the lines of the one in Jamaica which discussed the link between universities and national development. The economics of conferences led the C.E.L.C. to advise that there should be no pre-conference seminar — whether of university personnel or of any other category of delegates. We are comforted, however, by the knowledge that members of Commonwealth universities meet together in seminars and conferences organized by the Inter-University Council for Higher Education Overseas, the Association of Commonwealth Universities, and similar bodies. We recognize that these meetings do not have the same broad spectrum of representation from other educational interests as is provided at Commonwealth Education Conferences; but we hope that this will be offset to some extent by the presence of university men and women in national delegations at this Conference. Though they have been few in number, I am sure you will agree that they have made significant contributions to this Conference.

My third observation concerns the programme of development which this Conference has agreed to support. Such encouragement will be an enormous stimulus to the Education Division in carrying forward the book development programme, the further study of non-formal education, the collection and distribution of information, and the proposals for science and technical education. The Division also looks forward with enthusiasm to developing the proposals for the establishment of an Association of Polytechnics in Commonwealth Africa, regional staff college facilities for staff engaged in technician education, and a Commonwealth exchange and placement scheme for industrial training and experience. These are among the imaginative programmes whose development future conferences will appraise with interest. But perhaps the most overdue development is the action programme for education about the Commonwealth. This subject has been on the agenda of most Commonwealth Education Conferences, and it is gratifying that it has now been given the go-ahead by this Conference.

Let me now leave the Meeting of Officials and turn to the second part of the Conference. This was conceived as a sounding board for ideas and an opportunity to widen horizons, glimpse new perspectives and acquire new insights. It was not, and it did not turn out to be, a workshop on specific problems of specific countries.

The theme of the week was "The Economics of Education". We had the benefit of the advance distribution of lead papers on three aspects of the theme: *Education, Economic Policy and the National Budget* by Dr. Adedeji; *The Provision of Education and its Costs* by Professor Richard Jolly; and *Educational Financing* by Dr. Adiseshiah.

Each of the authors had been invited to present his paper in person, but unfortunately Dr. Adedeji was unable to be with us. In his absence Mr. Anyaoku, our Assistant Commonwealth Secretary-General, spoke incisively to his paper; and both Professor Jolly and Dr. Adiseshiah spoke enthusiastically to theirs.

But before we reached that stage we had the signal pleasure of listening to a stirring opening address by the Commonwealth Secretary-General, a powerful message of welcome read on behalf of the President of Ghana, and a wide-ranging keynote address by Dr. Coombs on "A Fresh Look at the World Educational Crisis".

The keynote address and the three lead papers have been the subject of exhaustive study by groups of delegates formed for the purpose, and the reports prepared by each of the groups have been the subject of consideration by Conference in plenary session.

You are, of course, aware that I am not an economist, and I am therefore happily relieved of the obligation to put before you any expert appraisal of the contributions of the learned speakers or any original thinking about the theme of the Conference. All I can do is to try to bring to bear upon the question the views of a layman who is concerned with educational administration and who has read only a fraction of the burgeoning literature dealing with the matter. And in this connection I doubt whether you will find anywhere a better analysis of these broad strands of the Conference theme than that so ably demonstrated by our authors in their several ways. And you will seldom have heard better presentations.

Permit me, however, to make just a few observations. In introducing his paper, Professor Jolly quoted an aphorism of Churchill's, that "from every five economists, you get six opinions — at least two from Keynes". This set me thinking, after having read all four papers and heard the authors of three of them, that something might have gone wrong, for there appeared an unusually broad similarity of approach and wide measure of consensus among them.

I am not qualified to perform the role of Keynes, but Professor Jolly's remark compelled me at least to try to put a few glosses on some of the issues. Let me begin with the emphasis to be put upon rural development. I am sure it is right to pay attention, and very considerable attention, to the rural situation; but I think it is essential to remember that there are equally pressing problems of urban development. These problems do not disappear if you divert attention to the solution of another problem. A successful rural development programme will in time contribute to the solution of urban problems in a variety of ways; but you

must give it time, and during that time you must tackle the urban problem also.

Next I must question the assumption underlying the suggestion that unit costs can be reduced for the system as a whole by diverting resources from the higher sectors of education to the primary sector. Let me confess that I have an interest in this matter; but I think it is a great mistake to assume that there are spare resources in the higher sector and that these are readily transferable to the primary. On balance I think you will find on close analysis that few resources are transferable, and if you were to make the transfer just like that you would create economic consequences that might be wholly undesirable. It does not seem to me that putting university teachers out of work or depriving bright young graduates of the opportunity to get university appointments is an answer to the problems of primary education.

Finally I think it is worth bearing in mind that there is a social as well as an economic aspect to the difficult choices that you will have to make. In this regard I was much struck by the comment a delegate made about the shift system. He said that its introduction created immense social problems where children were attached to a shift that was out of school at the very time that their parents were at work. His advice was: "If you have to introduce the shift system, get rid of it as quickly as possible".

I began with a reference to inexperience. Let me end with another. An apprentice jockey was riding a horse which the trainer fancied to win. He gave the apprentice elaborate instructions on how to ride the race. "Break fast from the start", he said, "secure a good position on the rails, and when you come to the top turn entering the straight, go for any opening you see, come through it and keep going to the winning post". Things went well as far as the top turn, but when the opening appeared the apprentice failed to come through. On his return to the unsaddling enclosure, the trainer berated him in no uncertain fashion. After a time, the apprentice, unable to contain himself any longer, delivered himself of a devastating question: "Mister," he asked, "have you ever tried to go through an opening that's moving faster than you?"

Our aim must be to get ahead of the educational problems that beset us and not miss the chance to go through any openings that will help us to do so. But I am sure that there will still be problems we have not overtaken by the time of the Eighth Commonwealth Education Conference. In our search for solutions, this week's proceedings will provide a checkpoint for the self examination of our educational systems for which Dr. Coombs asked, a foundation for the conduct of an annual audit of expenditure of the kind Dr. Adiseshiah advised, and a stimulus for gearing your own educational systems to instil into your people the self-confidence that is required to support the pressure for a new international economic order.

It has been a privilege and a pleasure for me to participate in this Conference, and I wish to express my appreciation to you for the confidence you have shown in the C.E.L.C. by assigning some difficult tasks to its judgement, and to add my own thanks to those expressions of appreciation with which this Conference is about to conclude.