

Book Reviews/Comptes Rendus

Association of Commonwealth Universities. *Universities facing the challenge of the eighties: can they survive in their present form?* Seminar papers presented during the ACU Council meeting held in the Caribbean 15-27 April 1982. London: The Association, 1982, 97 p. £2 surface mail, £3.65 airmail.

The Council, governing body of the ACU, is made up of 26 executive heads, representative of the Association's 245 member institutions. It meets annually, in one location or another in the Commonwealth. In 1982 the University of West Indies and the University of Guyana were hosts and there were five Canadians in attendance: Professor T.H.B. Symons (Trent), Hon. Treasurer of the Council, Dr. L.I. Barber (Regina), Dr. A.J. Earp (Brock), himself a former vice-chancellor of the University of Guyana, Dr. P.P.M. Meincke (Prince Edward Island), who presented one of the eight discussion papers, and Dr. J.-G. Paquet (Laval).

There were four sub-themes, on each of which two papers were read: contrasting problems facing universities in the developed and developing world; technical and technological education and training: the role of the universities; global problems and the challenge to the universities; national aspirations and academic integrity: need there be a conflict? As is pointed out in the preface by Dr. A. Christodoulou, secretary-general of the Association, these topics are not new. "They have, nevertheless, recently been thrown into sharper focus," he says, "as universities almost everywhere (and by no means only in the Commonwealth) have come under closer scrutiny by governments and by the communities they serve; and have been challenged to justify ethos as well as expense, curricula as well as cost-effectiveness, relevance as well as research."

In his opening address, Mr. A.Z. Preston (University of the West Indies) soberly observes that "the university's concern about its own survival in its present form parallels the global concern for the survival of the world as a viable ecosphere capable of meeting the needs of the billions who will inhabit it over the next twenty years."

The Hon. R.M. Nettleford (University of the West Indies) suggests that many of the problems facing universities in both the developed and the developing worlds are similar – partly because the Commonwealth universities and their leaders share a common source: the universities of the United Kingdom. He says, however, that their problems differ in degree. In this he is joined by Professor G. Ram Reddy (Osmania University) who notes that universities in the developing world are still besieged by far more applicants for entry than can be accommodated, and are more closely supervised by government.

In his paper on technological education Professor G.M. Richards (University of the West Indies) reveals an enthusiasm for his discipline, engineering, that approaches religious zeal. Of technological education, as it is and could be, he

has great expectations. "The engineer has no prescriptive right to a greater share of control," he says, "but it is the responsibility of some members of the profession to step outside the narrow mechanics of the professional task and bring a dynamic spirit of enterprise to the shaping of national and industrial policies. This will redress the present preponderance of negative policies and woolly direction which exists in many countries and many industries." For his part, Professor L.M. Birt (University of New South Wales) sees true technological education as that which is in harmony with Newman's idea of the university.

Dr. D.H. Irvine (University of Guyana) and Dr. P.P.M. Meincke (University of Prince Edward Island) identify similar lists of global problems. Both argue the necessity of multidisciplinary approaches to these problems by the universities. Dr. Meincke assesses how the challenges of global problems are being met by universities in their "present form and function." The score is only fair. He believes that the universities should be in a unique position to assist mankind to move into the era of new technologies and to take advantage of them in solving global problems. He concludes, however: "I think it highly unlikely that universities will be able to respond to this challenge, given the major strains they are under at the present time."

On the question whether there need be a conflict between national aspirations and academic integrity, Professor J. Kamba (University of Zimbabwe) observes diplomatically that what should be striven for is a balance between state control and institutional independence. Professor A. R. Carnegie (University of the West Indies) argues, with illustrations from his field of international law, that academic integrity requires aloofness from national aspirations. He refers to this as the "norm of detachment" and demonstrates that it can be observed.

A recurrent theme is expressed first by the Hon. R.M. Nettleford: "A new ethic rooted in the resolve to place man at the centre of the development process – which means now what it has always meant, namely his liberation from ignorance, fear, disease and hunger – is probably the university's greatest challenge and certainly one of its major problems if it is to survive."

These papers represent thoughtful reconsideration of old and continuing problems, problems that constitute "the challenge of the eighties." Whether the universities "can survive in their present form" is a question that is answered only indirectly: all are agreed that adaptation will be essential and share the hope that the universities will be able to respond.

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