

JOURNAL OF THE FACULTY OF ARTS

Royal University of Malta

Volume V

Number 4

1974

??-273-275

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Subscription: twenty five cents per copy

PRINTED AT THE MALTA UNIVERSITY PRESS



INTELLECTUAL PROLETARIAT

ONE of the sad problems of our time is the supply of redundant or unwanted intellectuals that are turned out in their hundreds every year by almost all the universities of the world. The democratization of Higher Education, like some other excellent ideas, is breaking down very tragically under the strain of everyday experience – the hard realities of the economic situation. Far too many Red-Brick Universities have sprung up and spread like mushrooms. As a result of this, there are now many more graduates in all sorts of subjects than ever before, but one wonders if this greater output of graduates has not been obtained at the expense of quality and also at the expense of social stability.

The line of demarcation between a Polytechnic and a University proper in the traditional sense of a seat of Higher Learning combining the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake with its direct or indirect results has been growing increasingly thin, so thin that it has almost become invisible. One feels that this line of demarcation is being rapidly removed in the name of social egalitarianism and social relevance in such a manner that now one can hardly any longer distinguish between a Polytechnic (a predominantly technical school) and a University. The two institutions cannot be distinguished from each other merely because one is empowered to confer degrees and the other is not. What is in a name? The idea of liberal knowledge has gone out of fashion with the generation of academics that believed in it. Governments that hold the strings of the purse crammed chock-full with the taxpayers' money have been dictating the new-fangled utilitarian policy. To support the new illiberal trends (the exclusion of the value of knowledge also for its

own sake, for instance) they enlist the services of obsequious educationists with an ideological bent of mind, mainly economists who equate humanity with numerals and fractions thereof. Governments everywhere, the more so in the less liberal countries, have their carefully hand-picked blue-eyed boys to help them justify the progressive (or regressive?) departure from the historical mission of a University as a seat of Higher Learning where knowledge can, and should, be pursued also for its own sake (a bourgeois luxury?).

We are a long way from the ideals which Cardinal Newman, consummate master of readable English prose and of clarity of ideas, discussed in his famous Dublin address on the function of a university. He was a great, clear-headed writer who could talk equally well on universities, drawing on the reserves of his wide personal culture, and on gentlemen and cads. Inevitably, the new times impose new conditions. We have to move with the times; indeed, it would be sheer folly to expect a modern university to survive perched on a height like an eyrie far from the madding crowd, where scholars, a handful of select, privileged professors, can pursue their studies without bothering about what is happening amongst the small fry outside the academic citadel to which they belong. Such a privileged community can no longer survive in our hectic, class-conscious society. The concept that a University should also have a social relevance is therefore sound; but only so long as the emphasis is on the word *also*. In other words, social relevance must be in addition to, and not instead of, the historical primary function of a University as a seat of Higher Learning where knowledge can be pursued for its own sake and continue to be, what it was for so many great minds, its own end. The stress must be not on class exclusiveness, but on quality regardless of the social status of the students' families. The wicked age of oligarchies is over. Or is it? The stress on quality must be uncompromisingly maintained, and where facilities are needed in order to enable the students of the poorer families to compete with those who come from better off families, these must be provided. The race for the prizes must be through the same racecourse under the same conditions. But once equality of opportunity has been made possible, universities should be more qualitatively selective. Only in this way can universities everywhere ensure a steady stream of good leaders in the various social and intellectual walks of life, and at

the same time maintain a reasonable ratio between the demand and supply on the academic market.

Far too many graduates are being produced everywhere who could have been more profitably employed where the demand still exceeds the supply. Unfortunately, we have everywhere an army of unemployed and unemployable graduates who will always bear society a grudge for real or imaginary wrongs, gnawed by the rankling feeling that they have been robbed of their youth and denied the opportunity of earning their living, because a short sighted and muddle-headed society has no place for them. Who is to blame for this? It is difficult to answer this question. Far too many wrong people have been put in the wrong places for the wrong motives. Ambitious careerists can be trusted to climb up the ladder of social promotion very unscrupulously, even if, to do so, they have to walk over other people's backs. When their legs are not strong enough, there is always somebody ready to push them up. I remember, some years ago now, a top-ranking British civil servant telling me that even stooges have their uses. The tragedy of highly placed mediocrity is immeasurable. There are far too many stooges everywhere, largely because they are the strongest bodyguard of the Servile State.

But to answer the question: One can, of course, say that the problem need not have been so acute either in Malta or in other countries had there been more careful long-term planning related to the country's industrial and academic market. Governments are always very lavish with vote-catching slogans, but they are not always as lavish or generous with long-term plans for the profitable use of intellectual manpower.

This is not merely an academic problem. It is also a social problem of great magnitude, and it is not confined to Malta or any other single country. It is the widespread rot at the roots of universities everywhere.

THE EDITOR