

EDUCATION AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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THE role of education in national development has become so accepted that few people stop to analyse how education does make its contribution. In this short paper I hope to trace the various factors which lead to national development and indicate the role education can play. I shall do so with special reference to Malta.

The first aspect of national development which I would like to deal with is national identity. In a country like Malta, which for hundreds of years was under foreign rule, and where independence has been gained only recently, national development means that its citizens must seek and strengthen their national identity. Extreme nationalism has led to enough rivalry and wars between different countries, and should not be encouraged. However a country does not become a nation if its people are not proud of their identity, of their language and culture and of those things which make them different from citizens of other countries. If we are to ensure national development we must care for our national heritage – we must care for our countryside, our trees, our birds, our bastions, our buildings.

We must know the history of our country and be aware of the contribution our religion has made and is making to our culture and way of life. We must be aware of the way our country is administered and also know the philosophy and ideals of our political parties so that we can make the right choice between them. We must have full knowledge of the Constitution of our country and of the principles on which it is based. We ought to be proud of the fact that we are Maltese. Up till quite recently we were not. Many Maltese, for varied reasons, had lost their national identity and were very different to acknowledge that they were Maltese. They preferred being mistaken for Englishmen, Italians or some other nationality. We had an 'inferiority' complex and tended to play down those things of which we should have been proud.

Educational institutions have a vital role in this aspect of na-

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tional development. Every level of the educational system has the function of helping our young find and be proud of their national identity. In schools in the United States, where it was important that children of immigrants should be integrated as soon as possible into the national identity, the day begins with a statement of allegiance to the flag. In Maltese schools, we teach the same — respect towards the Flag and the President, and encourage participation in national festivities and occasions.

In our schools we lay the foundations for the proper use of our language, which we teach not solely as a means of learning other subjects, but also so that our children can appreciate and use efficiently the language that unites us. At higher levels, our students study the structure and development of our language and appreciate how our language has been used to express the thoughts, ideals of our people, and has reflected our way of life.

In the schools we teach our children about the history of our country. Unfortunately, up to now we have not had the proper approach to the teaching of Maltese history, mainly because the text books we had on Maltese history were written more from the point of view of the occupying power than from that of the Maltese themselves. There has been a distorted view of Maltese history mainly because this was not based on documentation and research, but on biased reporting and sometimes, outright invention. The situation is improving. Researchers are finding how Maltese behaved, felt and reacted. The stress is being put on how the Maltese maintained their national identity in their long search for independence. Within a short time, our secondary schools will be provided with a new history text book which should help teachers make their students see themselves as part of the long sequence of the history of their country.

In the schools we encourage children to protect and enhance their environment. We make them aware of the wonder of birds and trees. We encourage them to raise seedlings which later on they plant and care for in their own village. Through the formal and informal teaching of Civics schools make students aware and proud of their country.

There is another kind of development in which schools have a vital role to play. This is development in the quality of life, in the culture and artistic expression, and in the moral tone of the country. This development is the slow ascent of a country towards real civilisation — the liberalisation of the human spirit and the opportunity for every citizen to develop his potentialities to the full.

This development is achieved when the people who make a nation are men of principle who respect the personality and rights of others and who understand that everybody is equal under the law, that human rights apply to all. This social development occurs when there is organisation and order to allow the individual freedom to express himself in art, craft, and in achievement. There is no need to enlarge on the contribution education plays. It is the schools that give the young the basic skills which enable them to raise themselves above their surroundings. Children are helped to learn to appreciate the beauty around them and encouraged to be creative; where there is good education there is a renaissance in society, in its arts, in its creativity, in its respect towards the environment, in its search for new ideas and towards truth. Society then respects the individual and abhors conflict and war. It also becomes discriminating in its use of technology and its products.

Naturally, this aspect of development depends to a large extent, but not wholly so, on the level of economic development. People who are hungry, people who do not find decent accommodation, people without adequate medical care, people who cannot find work, cannot improve the quality of life unless there is enough economic development to help rise life above the level of a struggle for existence. The key is economic development, though once this is achieved, it depends a great deal on the social development of a country whether the wealth gained leads to materialism and to a deterioration of the quality of life or to an all round improvement in society.

We read a great deal on the part played by education towards the economic development of a country. The sentence 'Education is a good investment' is so often used that it has become a slogan, and few people analyse what it means. Up to the first World War, the idea that education is a good investment was little known. Education was considered as the privilege of the rich, as a social asset and not as a means for greater productivity. Education was also sought by the middle classes so that they could maintain and improve their standing. There was little awareness of the link between education and economic development. One remembers that countries like England, Germany and the United States had their Industrial Revolution and developed their technology-based economy when more than half of their working populations was illiterate. With the struggle against colonialism, when many countries found their political independence hindered by lack of economic development, the concept of education being a good investment

came into its own. Poor countries found that capital invested in education leaves high interest by providing part of the infrastructure required for economic development. Education not only leads to better citizens, but provides the manpower required at every level, manpower which is adaptable to new techniques. The most important 'factor' a country can have is its own people. It is the thought, the skills, the art and genius of its people that provide crops and food, and use raw materials to produce goods required. Countries which were rich in minerals and other raw materials but whose people were not trained or educated, remained undeveloped and were exploited by other more developed countries. Others did not have raw materials but through the high level of education of their people, managed to attain a high level of economic development.

In Malta, we have practically no raw materials and we have to depend on our economic development on the skills and discipline of our people. Because of this, we, perhaps more than other countries, have to rely on the contribution of education. We also have to ensure efficiency in the educational system lest it consumes badly needed capital without giving adequate returns. Many countries devote a big share of the national budget to education and Malta can be considered among these countries. Of the £M74,456,803 Capital and Recurrent Vote in the 1975/76 Budget, £M7,396,050 were earmarked for education and culture, and this was a year of capital expenditure on drydocks, telecommunications and public housing.

In all countries educational systems face a dilemma. In contrast to other industries, education is both a producer and consumer of high level manpower; if it is to compete with other industries for the manpower it needs for its teaching force, it must pay its teachers competitive salaries. In many countries, Malta included, a high percentage of the money voted on education goes into salaries. During the 1975/76 financial year, about 68 per cent of the education and culture vote was spent on salaries. Since so much is needed for education to maintain itself, the educational system must be efficient and of high quality. Every pupil who leaves primary school not knowing how to read and write, at least in Maltese; every student who leaves a Trade School without having learned a trade; every student who leaves secondary school without the promise of being a good, productive citizen, is a waste not only of human potential but also of badly needed capital which could have been spent on hospital equipment or housing or factories.

When schools help to produce honest, hard working citizens with a sense of discipline, when they encourage in the young initiative and imagination and develop their talents, an enormous amount of energy is released in the country. Every level of the educational system has its part to play and each part overlaps the other. At the primary level children are trained in the basic reading, writing and computing skills so that they can have the tools to continue learning. Children are also made more intensely aware of the world around them. Their sense of curiosity and imagination are encouraged and sharpened and their physical and mental energies released and channelled towards self-development. At this stage children begin to learn to work together. It is the primary schools that should ensure that potential is not nipped in the bud. This education and training continue at the secondary level but there is a shift in bias. At the primary level the concentration is on the child himself. At the secondary level the focus is still the child, but the child in society and his contribution to this society. A student is made to think of a job and to acquire the training and skills he will require in his future job. This is not the sole aim of secondary education, but it is one of the major ones. In a number of countries this period of general education and training is becoming longer. When a skilled worker is expected to change his job at least three times during his working life, there is need for people who are adaptable and who can use their initiative in fitting themselves for new skills and techniques. They have to have a solid foundation of education so that they can adapt quickly to the changes that occur. This long term policy of manpower training is more easily adopted by rich countries. But sometimes, when a country is in its 'take off' stage of development, when it lacks essential manpower at every level to maintain and expand its existing industries, it must make use of 'short term' measures. The need arises to take short cuts in training young people into the skills urgently required by the country - welding, machine fitting, plumbing, electrical installation, and other trades and crafts, so that factories can operate. Malta has adopted both systems. The Technical Institutes accept their intake into middle level technician courses from students who have finished their five year secondary school course. The Institutes have had and will continue to have a very important function in the training of skilled manpower and their role will be intensified and expanded. Besides the Technical Institutes there are also such specialised institutions such as the School for Nursing, the Nautical School and the School of Electronics. However, des-

pite these institutions there was a considerable waste of human potential and far too many of our young people were leaving school untrained and without the motivation to continue their education and training elsewhere. With the raising of the school leaving age to sixteen, many boys and girls who had seen little relevance of the education they were being given, saw the extra years as an extended period of frustration. These young people were eager to go out to work but did not know how and the new Trade Schools fitted both their needs and also the need of the country for young people skilled in crafts and trades. The different conditions in the Trades Schools, which to young people looked and felt more like factories than schools, gave frustrated students the motivation and hopes they had lacked. Besides offering them opportunities to learn new skills, the Trade Schools offer them the opportunity to learn new attitudes of self-reliance and self-help. Young people in Trade Schools are taught to make the things they need in their schools. They are also taught to become productive as soon as possible. The Trade School experiment shows that it will succeed in its short term aims. Whether it will succeed in satisfying the long term manpower needs of the country depends on three main points:

1. The provision of facilities for life-long education where these young people, whose general education may have been somewhat curtailed, will develop other skills or broaden those they have, and improve their general education after they have started work.

2. The organisation of the educational system in such a way that there are no closed doors between one level and another. A promising student in a Trade School, or one who is a late developer, should find it possible to move to a Technical Institute and from there to the Polytechnic if he is able and willing to do so.

3. Sympathetic supervision and further on-the-job training once these young people find jobs.

At present the skilled manpower our economy needs is trained in the schools. One of the reasons is that with the exception of the Drydocks and a few government departments, there are no major industries which take responsibility for training the new manpower they need. Vocational training is generally not done 'on the job' but in the Trades Schools, in the Technical Institutes and the Polytechnic which train the craftsmen, the technicians, the waiters, office staff, the cooks and the seamen Malta needs.

The third level of education – the University and the Polytechnic, has the function (among others) of providing high level man-

power. It is possible that up to now there has been little planning on what this high level manpower should be. The general attitude was that the more graduates we had the better it would be for the general tone of the country; that these graduates and professional people would give Malta the leadership it needs and help towards the development of a national identity and the social development of the country. No thought may have been paid on the right mix of professions and the only control and direction was the number of places available. Not enough thought was paid on the relevance of university and polytechnic courses to the economic development needs of the country. Even when education was looking after its own manpower needs – teachers, it did not take into consideration its actual needs. It kept producing teachers for the primary schools when what was required was teachers for the secondary schools and did not realise that it was overproducing. Third level education could be very efficiently producing skills and professions the country does not really need. Recently however there is more awareness that these two institutions should be geared to the economic development of the country. Both are asking such questions as 'What kind of engineer does Malta need? How can we have better managers, trade union leaders, accountants and teachers? How could degree courses be made relevant to the students and their future work? How can we encourage research which can help our economic development?' Both Institutions are become aware that they must get their priorities right and that they are duty bound not only to expand but also to prune if they are to use efficiently funds allocated to them.

Economic growth and educational expansion are mutually dependent. The former creates the financial and psychological conditions which are favourable to the latter, and inversely, educational expansion, especially at the secondary and higher levels of technical and vocational training, is a necessary condition of economic progress. When deciding the relative values to be attributed in a development plan to the various types and levels of vocational and technical training, a clear and accurate picture of the manpower needs in the various occupational categories and at the level of skills is very important. It takes time to set up new schools and to complete the training of young people attending them. It takes even longer to train teachers in new skills. Forecasting manpower needs is never easy and depends on the success or otherwise of the development plan. Such hazards are considerable in the large industrialized countries. They are even more serious in the developing countries.

In Malta we share the same difficulties and may have some of our own because of the small size of the country. It is easier to have a thorough knowledge of the occupational structure of the active population so that existing deficits can be corrected. The relatively small numbers involved make it possible to depend on expatriate expertise until local personnel can take over training responsibilities. However, any mistakes in manpower training are felt more because they cannot be so readily absorbed. At the higher levels of manpower there is always the danger of a 'brain drain'. At this level it is uneconomical to train small numbers and over production may lead to frustration and under-use of highly qualified personnel.

The various services in a country always make requests which together exceed the country's financial possibilities and a political decision has to be taken on allocation to particular services. Education also falls under this restraint. In developing countries the decision may be to give priority provisionally to the economic aspect of educational expansion as the best way of obtaining in a relatively short time a wide educational expansion based on purely human and cultural motives. In Malta, the general tendency has been to base the expansion of education largely on human and social considerations and not simply on economic needs. It is only lately that attempts are being made to give the economic needs more stress by basing the educational pyramid on an estimated structure of skill categories for the active population. What we are seeing now is a revaluation of educational priorities to make education more relevant and rewarding both to the individual and society.