THE CRISIS IN EDUCATION

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It does not demonstrate any great prescience that I was able to give the title of this lecture as “The Crisis in Education” twelve months ago, although I was not to know at that time quite how deeply that crisis would be affecting Britain, and in particular Manchester, at the time of the lecture itself. Indeed, the notion of crisis in education was first propounded by Philip Coombs in his well-known volume *The World Educational Crisis*, as long ago as 1968, a time when there was, as he has subsequently indicated, “a time of widespread educational euphoria”. Indeed, the title of his book and the thesis which it contained shocked the international educational community and stirred widespread discussion and debate.

That debate was not officially recognised in this country until 18 October 1976, a date that we can pinpoint with precision, for it was on that date that the then Prime Minister, James Callaghan, in a speech at Ruskin College, Oxford, called for a public debate on education: a debate which was not to be confined to those professionally concerned with education but was to give full opportunity for employers, trade unions and parents, as well as teachers and administrators, to make their views known. In his speech the Prime Minister suggested that the increasing complexity of modern life meant that standards in many areas, including education, needed to go on rising. There was, he said, a widespread feeling that this was not happening and that it would be to the advantage of all involved in education if these concerns were aired, ill-founded fears put at rest, and shortcomings remedied.

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1 A lecture delivered in the John Rylands University library of Manchester on Wednesday, 4 December 1985.
The speech was followed by a series of consultations initiated by the Secretaries of State for Education and Science, and for Wales, and took place, with what seems by hindsight to be amazing speed, in November and December of the same year. These were followed by a series of eight regional conferences in February and March 1977, and the eventual publication of a Green Paper which was presented to Parliament in July 1977.6

The four main topics selected for debate as a result of the preliminary consultations were:

a) the curriculum  
b) the assessment of standards  
c) the education and training of teachers  
d) school and working life.

It is interesting to note that these topics, articulated during a Labour administration, show a direct continuity with the concerns of our present Secretary of State for Education, who has attracted so much opprobrium for stressing precisely these issues. Indeed, the only topic which was not on that list, and which is now seen to be absolutely crucial is the issue of resources, of the amount of the national budget which should be used for the development of our educational system.

Those who are concerned with educational development in low-income countries were surprised at the time that the issue of resources was not raised more publicly, for in those countries it is not uncommon for upwards of 30 per cent of the national budget to be dedicated to the educational system. But in this country most educationists were unaware of the lessons to be learnt from the comparative study of international systems of education and did not realise how critical the resource issue was to become in Britain.

Before we examine more closely the nature of the crisis in education, however, we owe it to ourselves to recognise what has been achieved during the forty years since the ending of the 1939-45 war. These years have seen a transformation of our social fabric and mode of life and of the nature of the education given in our schools. Our primary education system has attracted international attention and has produced a type of education which has genuinely attempted to meet the needs of all our children. We committed ourselves for the first time, forty years ago, to second-

ary education for all and have gradually, and sometimes painfully, filled that concept with meaning. Our educational provision for children in special need, particularly those with physical and mental handicaps, has made great progress and we have more recently recognized that the proportion of children with special learning needs is much larger than we had thought and have been taking steps to take better account of this fact and to integrate the teaching of the majority of children with special needs into the work of our ordinary school system.

All this was accomplished at a time when the number of children in our schools was expanding rapidly and when we were making successful efforts to increase our teacher-training provision to match that expansion.

There is absolutely no doubt that the quality of teachers joining the profession has risen substantially and we are well on the way to having established a totally graduate teaching force, equipped with skills which even twenty years ago we would not have envisaged that teachers would need to possess. It is a matter of intense surprise to me that the impetus has been maintained in spite of the crippling contraction of the teacher-education system and subsequent demoralisation of tutors and of teachers which followed the White Paper *Education: a Framework for Expansion* in 1972.\(^7\) I believe that it would be obtuse short-sightedness not to recognise the tremendous gains that we have made in our educational provision during the period that I have been discussing.

And yet we find ourselves facing a most critical situation in 1985. Why is this?

Let us look back at the introduction to the consultative document of July 1977. Here it was remarked that “the Prime Minister’s Ruskin College speech was made against a background of strongly critical comment in the press and elsewhere on education and educational standards”. Children’s standards of performance in their schoolwork were said to have declined. The curriculum, it was argued, paid too little attention to the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic, and was overloaded with fringe subjects. Teachers lacked adequate professional skills and did not know how to discipline children or to instil in them concern for hard work or good manners. Underlying all this was the feeling that the educational system was out of touch with the

fundamental needs for Britain to survive economically in a highly competitive world through the efficiency of its industry and commerce”. All of this could have been derived from speeches made by our present Secretary of State for Education rather than from a document published by a previous Labour Government.

Yet as the consultative document recognised, many of these criticisms were misplaced. The document stated “it is simply untrue that there has been a general decline in educational standards. Critics who argue on these lines often make false comparisons, for instance with some non-existent educational Golden Age, or matching today’s school leavers against those of a generation ago without allowing for the fact that a far larger proportion of boys and girls now stay on into the sixth form. Recent studies have shown clearly that today’s school children read better than those of thirty years ago. Far more children, over a wider range of ability, study a modern language or science than did a generation ago. Many more take, and pass, public examinations. Many more go on to full-time higher education”. Most of these observations are still true, though there is certainly no room for complacency, especially when international comparisons are made with other developed countries as they have been during the last ten years, with regard to standards of achievement, especially in mathematics and science.

Yet the task of the schools has never been more difficult than at the present time. We expect schools to introduce children to concepts and areas of knowledge which were largely unknown fifteen or twenty years ago, but this task is undertaken against a background of disagreement about the requirements which our society should make of its schools. This disagreement is particularly worrying when it concerns ethical teaching and questions of discipline and authority. It is not the function of the teacher to solve the moral dilemmas of the latter part of the twentieth century, nor is he capable of doing it. Yet he still has to do his work and make day-to-day decisions in the classroom. To achieve what can be conceived of as his rightful function the teacher today requires the wisdom of Solomon, the patience of Job, the spiritual qualities of a Ghandi and that capacity to extricate himself from tight corners which was attributed to Houdini. It is not easy to

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9 Ibid., p. 2.
find candidates who fill that job description, especially when it seems to be assumed that the satisfaction of doing the work of a teacher should be sufficient reward, even on a subsistence level salary.

As a result there is no doubt that there is a growing lack of confidence by the public at large, and not only amongst the members of the present Government, in the work of the schools and the results of our many years of compulsory education.

In the years since Education: a Framework for Expansion there have been a number of other developments, quite startling in their size and complexity. One might, for example, quote the programme which has now put computers in virtually every primary and secondary school in the country, supplying not only the hardware but also appropriate software to enable the computers to be used to good advantage. One might venture the hypothesis that it is because of this micro-computer programme that Britain has more computers per unit of population than any other country in the world, including Japan.

We can draw two conclusions from the success of that particular project: one is that, given proper funding and adequate planning, our schools can make massive changes in their teaching techniques and embrace modern technology in a way which is the envy of the rest of the world. Too rarely, however, have specific aims of our educational system been adequately articulated and provided with sufficient funds for their successful implementation. A general undertow of criticism is no substitute for the careful and painstaking identification of specific aims.

The second conclusion concerns the relationship between education and industry. The computer was invented in Britain but it has been exploited predominantly in other countries. It can fairly be said that while the schools have successfully spread a knowledge of computers and their work throughout the school-going population and their parents, industry in Britain has failed to capitalise on the tremendous boom in computer sales brought about by the success of the school programme. There is a popular myth, regularly repeated in Government publications and in Ministers’ speeches, that if only teachers and children knew more about industry then many brighter and better prepared children would be available to help its development. I do not believe this to be the case. It is not necessary to provide special opportunities for teachers to work in industry as the 1977 Green Paper suggested.
Teachers are not ignorant of conditions in industry and commerce. Most of them have worked in these areas at some stage in their careers. For most of them, however, this contact with industry has been a depressing experience, introducing them to a world of frustration, time-wasting, demarcation problems and talk of redundancy: an experience which they found profoundly unsatisfying. Many of the parents of the children in schools also work in industry and commerce and have experienced the same conditions. I am absolutely certain that when Government and industry have combined to make an industrial career a satisfying and rewarding one, and it becomes evident that this is the case, there will be no shortage of excellently prepared entrants into our productive industry. In its best moments the DES recognises that this is the case, as in the discussion paper *Educating our Children.*

"If certain occupations are perceived by young people—and by their parents, family and friends who also offer them advice—as unattractive (and the jobs may indeed be unattractive for a variety of reasons), it is unreasonable to expect careers advisers and teachers to remove the antipathy towards those occupations. It does not follow that simply teaching more about a job makes it more attractive: the result may be exactly the opposite. The remedy must lie with the employers to make the job (or at least its image) attractive". This cannot be repeated too often. The failure of industry and commerce to attract the best of our teachers from schools and higher education must be attributed primarily to the failure of our industry to come to terms with the needs of the wider work force, and not to the schools. Education in Japan, for example, is far more theoretical and arts-based than education in Britain: it is the industrial organisation in that country and its attitude to its employees which has led to the considerable progress it has made in world markets in the post-war years.

The advent of the computer is only one way in which teachers have radically revised the curriculum in the last few years, have adapted to change and have been helping to develop a variety of new approaches to their work, not least in the field of assessment and examination. Let us ask again why it is that in spite of these impressive advances there appears still to be a lack of confidence, not only amongst the members of the present Government, but

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amongst the community at large, in the work of the schools and in the results of our many years of compulsory education.

One reason, of course, is ignorance of the work of the schools and of the substantial amount of assessment of the results of that work which is now available. This is clearly, however, not an adequate answer. Teachers themselves are also disenchanted with the schools, as the recent wave of strike action clearly demonstrates. The number of intending applicants to the teaching profession is also falling year by year, and this is, at least in part, an index of the esteem in which the profession is held.

Applications from graduates to train as secondary school teachers have decreased this year by some 26 per cent in comparison with this time last year, while applicants with science qualifications have decreased by 40 per cent. Those students who get as far as entering a training programme and start their first teaching practice are subject to a barrage of advice from serving teachers not to continue with their programmes of study, while the conditions they find in schools, both in physical provision and in the morale of the school community, are not conducive to the development of a healthy professional attitude among new entrants to the profession.

This disenchantment with the work of the schools is, then, one symptom of the crisis in education, and it is one to which we will return later. What are the other symptoms? Undoubtedly the most important is the generally-held assumption, expressed frequently in the popular press, that Britain is becoming a violent society and that this has its roots in the failure of our educational system. This is often coupled with the accusation that young people no longer respect authority in the same way as their elders did.

There are a number of observations that we need to make with regard to this aspect of the crisis in education. The first is that undoubtedly education no longer expects or instils the same sort of respect for authority that was common in the more authoritarian and hierarchical system of pre-war days. One has only to compare the photographs of rows of children sitting with folded arms in the Victorian or Edwardian classroom, with photographs of the modern primary school with children working independently or in groups at appropriately-sized furniture, scattered throughout the classroom, to note the revolution which has occurred in the attitude to authority of the present-day school.
Indeed, this is a revolution that I have experienced in my own lifetime, since the classrooms in which I was educated would not have appeared radically different from classrooms in those earlier photographs. The same revolution has occurred throughout education. My own university teachers always wore gowns when giving formal lectures; a practice which has now virtually completely disappeared from the majority of universities. An Indian student of mature years and great responsibility told me of the disorientation that she felt when she realised that students in my Department did not respect me sufficiently to jump to their feet every time I entered the room to begin a lecture. For her the respect which she felt it right to pay was not just to me as an individual but to the importance of the joint enterprise of seeking for truth in our particular field of study. The fact of the matter is that modern educational theory places little priority on inculcating respect for authority but is intended to serve other ends. For a long time we have been told that we should be producing pupils who can think for themselves, who can work independently, who know how to use the resources of a variety of different media to seek truth for themselves, people who will be self-motivated, innovative and inventive. I believe that by-and-large we have been successful in this enterprise, but this has not been without certain social implications with which, as a society, we have not been able fully to come to terms. For the older members of society it is not a comforting experience to be questioned closely and critically about our assumptions, standards and working practices by children, students, and new entrants to our trades and professions, and we often react to this by criticism and confrontation.

Let me give you an example from the third world. In many such countries respect for elders and in particular for parents, is one of the keystones of society. Yet in the schools the children are taught to think for themselves and are shown quite clearly that many of the beliefs of their parents are incorrect and possibly dangerous. They may be taught, for example, that they should not drink water from the local well unless that water has been boiled in order to kill the organisms which might lead to ill-health. When the children go home and tell their parents that they must boil their water, the parents are outraged. They have been drinking the water from the well for years; they cannot see in the water any of the dangerous elements that the children describe as being there,
and a confrontation develops between the parental authority and the new knowledge and attitudes gained in the schools. Something similar was seen in the initial stages of the British campaign in schools against smoking. Many primary school children were caused great distress by virtually being told that their parents were killing themselves by excessive cigarette smoking. How are they to react to the different messages which they are getting from the school and from the home? Most schools are, in fact, teaching children to respect the opinions of others, to deal with them in a civilized way, to look at issues on their own merits and to prefer the orderly settlement of contentious issues by discussion, argument and appeal to facts rather than through violence. The messages which they are getting from home, from the television and from films, are often very different and these messages often carry with them the unspoken assent, and sometimes the spoken assent, of their parents. Most of us would support children who resist brutal or salacious acts or suggestions from their parents, yet in doing so we make a direct attack upon parental authority.

This is an area much spoken about but too little explored by serious research. One such piece of research recently conducted in my Department by Messrs. Murray and Thompson and published recently in the *Journal of Adolescence* produced results which are very thought provoking. A detailed study of over 2,000 pupils in four Manchester comprehensive schools was conducted into their attitudes towards holders of three authority roles: namely parents, teachers and the police. The results provide little support for the position often taken in the literature that adolescents are generally anti-authority. On the contrary, the evidence points in the opposite direction with favourable attitudes being displayed to all three authority roles but in particular towards police and parents. Time does not permit a detailed study of this research, though I might just indicate the further findings that “in general girls exhibit a more favourable attitude to authority than boys. Authority relationships weaken with age and organisation of schools in terms of ‘caring’ principals result in a weakening of adult authority relationships”. Thus “in attempting to analyse the problem of the assumed declining respect for adult authority by adolescents we are confronted by a complex situation involving

on the one hand unsupported assumptions and on the other significant findings which point to the interplay of both individual and social variables in influencing attitudes and behaviour".\textsuperscript{12}

The fact of the matter is that society as a whole is looking to the schools to solve problems which have been found insoluble by the rest of society. Consequently large and important areas of social life are pushed into the curriculum of the schools in the hope that they will be able to give definitive solutions to problems which baffle those who place them on the school agenda. The unproved assumption that schools can do this work then leads to the overcrowding of the curriculum not only of schools but also of institutions of teacher education which are supposed on the one hand to improve the basic skills of the teachers in imparting the knowledge and skills which all children are expected to have when they leave school; and at the same time to deal with issues such as equal opportunities, life in a multi-cultural society, anti-racism, anti-sexism, drug, tobacco and solvent abuse, violence and hooliganism, and so on. Yet those basic disciplines which might help teachers as well as other adults to solve these problems, disciplines such as philosophy, sociology and psychology, are openly discouraged; the James Report, for example, stated quite clearly that initial teacher education "should concentrate on preparation for work appropriate to a teacher at the beginning of his career, rather than on formal courses in 'educational theory' ... it must be doubted whether such studies ... are, in terms of priorities, a useful major element in initial training".\textsuperscript{13} My own belief is that our schools are doing a very great deal to inculcate an appropriate and thoughtful attitude to what might roughly be called ethical issues, both personal and social. They take a more positive attitude to these issues than the society in which they are placed, and often seem to be fighting a losing battle against the wider society which seems totally unable to come to terms with the problems which it is facing.

Society has failed to reach any common mind on such issues as the amount of violence which is acceptable in picketing or the conduct of public meetings, on petty and more complicated theft, on sexual practices and so on, and cannot blame the schools for its own indecision. The schools teach a simple, traditional code of

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., p. 219.
ethics but they have little hope of such teaching being successful when it is flouted every day by the assumptions and actions of the adults whom the pupils meet both outside and inside the school.

The fact that the public expects the impossible of the schools does little to ameliorate the lack of confidence in the educational system felt, and frequently expressed, by the public. Nor is the situation helped by the fact that teachers themselves often display in their own trade union negotiations precisely the characteristics which they deplore in a great deal of their teaching. Salary negotiations are a good example of the failure of British society to solve the major problems with which it is faced. Our present policy of negotiation through often violent confrontation can hardly be the most constructive way of settling such issues in the modern world. Related to this is our greater failure to relate income to the value to society of different occupations. How are we to evaluate the contributions of, for example, the armed forces, the police, the teaching profession, the medical profession, football and tennis players and other sports stars, those who provide our water, transport, and refuse disposal, stock brokers, company directors, etc? The attention we give to such major and vitally important issues is spasmodic and the level of skill we bring to their resolution is at the primitive handicraft level. Yet it is the results of this inaction and inefficiency that lead directly to the situation in schools which both public and government increasingly criticize and blame on the teaching profession or, sometimes in other countries, on the educational process itself. Indeed, even in our own country there is little doubt that education has been progressively de-valued during the last decades at all levels from primary to higher education.

A symptom rather than a cause of this devaluation is the under-funding which the educational system has progressively received. The payment of teachers, to which I have already referred, is always a difficult problem since there can be very little economy of scale where education is concerned. For every 25 to 30 pupils a new teacher is required, and most of those concerned with education believe that on balance a reduction of average class size is desirable, if only to allow withdrawal and teaching in small groups of pupils with special learning needs.

For every new group of 25 pupils, therefore, one needs to employ one additional teacher. Such experimentation as we have undertaken with new media, most of which has also been greatly
under-funded, with the possible exception of the computer education programme, has demonstrated that the contribution of the new technology is not a reduction in educational costs but, where properly used, an increase in learning effectiveness. Moreover, as the demands made on the schools by an increasingly technological society become more onerous so, inevitably, do the costs of running the schools: a factor which operates even more conspicuously at higher education level.

Most organisations have areas in which it is possible to make savings, and the education industry is no exception. When the elimination of waste and extravagance has been achieved, however, further reductions in finance can only result in a decrease of efficiency. A whole series of HMI reports, and it is a matter for continuing gratitude that HMI have managed to remain so independent of the DES officials—a situation which can only be maintained at the cost of increased vigilance—has shown that the schools are suffering greatly as a result of their present underfunding. This situation will have most damaging effects on British life in the years to come, just as will the damage which may well be irreparable, which has been inflicted on British higher education and, particularly, on the university sector, during the past five years, especially in the areas of science and technology. It is very difficult to explain why any nation striving for industrial excellence should have deliberately inflicted such a grievous wound on its own body except by the hypothesis that the disaffection with the educational process referred to above has defeated a rational judgement about the results of present policies.

This under-funding of education has led to an increasing alienation of the teaching profession and of the local education authorities which are responsible for the provision of the education service, and to a consequent disaffection amongst pupils, a diminution of interest amongst graduates and school leavers in entering the teaching profession, and an unwillingness by teachers to engage in the multiplicity of curriculum development and assessment projects which are currently on the agenda. At the same time, and partly as a consequence of these factors, we see an increasing centralisation of powers over education within the hands of central government, a centralisation which is quite alien to our normal traditions of decentralising education decision making, finance and control to local authorities. Incidentally, this tradition of decentralisation is one which has been exported by
Britain to many other Commonwealth countries, greatly to their benefit.

Ironically enough, the demoralisation of the teaching profession and the wilful diminution of the effectiveness of our schools, colleges and universities, has happened, as I have already indicated, at a time when the standards of the teaching profession have improved almost beyond recognition. As a result of the James Commission Report and a number of other important reports, the teaching profession is now rapidly becoming an all-graduate profession, while the in-service training opportunities which have been available during the last few years have given us a teaching force which is more highly qualified than any we have seen in the past.

Unfortunately, this cannot be said of the large number of third world countries who are also in the grip of the educational crisis. Indeed, the lack of an adequately qualified teaching force is one of the main constituents of the crisis which they are undergoing. This is partly as a result of the massive increase in education in developing countries in the years following independence. In Nigeria, for example, the percentage of 5- to 14-year-olds attending primary schools rose from 16 per cent in 1950 to 35 per cent in 1960, while the percentage of 15- to 19-year-olds attending secondary level education rose in the same ten years from 1 per cent to 5 per cent, a tenfold increase. This was a staggering achievement, especially when one considers that the school-age population was also increasing rapidly at a compound rate of approximately 2.8 per cent per annum. The increase has continued. Between 1960 and 1980 enrolment in African primary schools increased by 218 per cent, compared with 1 per cent in developed countries. Enrolment in secondary schools increased by 636 per cent compared with 72 per cent in developed countries, while enrolment in Higher Education increased by 709 per cent compared with 214 per cent in developed countries. (Incidentally, the percentage increase in higher education in Latin America during the same twenty-year period to 1980 was 831 per cent.) When one takes into account that in most developing countries at least 50 per cent of the entire population is under 16 years of age, the size of the problem can be clearly seen.

During the same period, and still in many countries today, the best qualified teachers were leaving the schools in order to enter politics and the many commercial, industrial and administrative
careers which were far more rewarding financially than the teaching profession. It is totally impossible for education to compete with industry and commerce for the services of well-qualified citizens, and especially graduate citizens. All these factors combined necessitated a crash teacher training programme which did little to safeguard the already low level of the teaching profession. The fact that the productive sector of the population is relatively small in comparison to the school-age population also ensures that teachers will continue to be poorly rewarded and that the ever-increasing school system will be under-financed, in spite of the very high percentage of the gross national product which such countries devote to the maintenance and growth of their educational systems.

The main difference between the forms in which the educational crisis is experienced in Britain and in developing countries is therefore the relative poverty, in some cases extreme, of the developing countries, the proportion of school-age children actually attending school, the rapidly-rising population, and the acute shortage of adequately-qualified teachers.

The last factor may only remain a difference for a short period since, as has already been indicated, the supply of well-qualified candidates for the teaching profession in this country is already declining in a marked way and is likely to continue to decline unless the status and working conditions of the teaching profession are radically modified. This is particularly the case with teachers of the sciences, of technology and of mathematics. This shortage has been acute in Britain and in most of the developing world, for several decades. Signs that in this country we were beginning to match supply and demand, have now faded and the decline in the number of applicants for training places for 1986 is far greater than the overall decline, serious though the latter is. It would appear, therefore, that we are entering a period of exacerbated shortage in the supply of science-based teachers as a world-wide phenomenon.

Many of the other marks of crisis seem to be similar in both developed and developing countries, though they may differ in scale. In particular one can point to the commonly perceived decline in traditional morality, and the increase of theft and violence which is everywhere associated with the spread of education. The increasing violence about which we so often
complain in Britain is in fact a world-wide phenomenon, as any regular visitor to the cities of Africa, Asia and Latin America can well testify. Nor is this change of mores confined to the cities; it is also a rural phenomenon, though the more remote the area from the influence of western education, the less this trend has developed.

Another common factor is the rapidly-changing content of education to which I have already referred. The impact of modern technology on the school system, as regards both the content of the education and the means by which that education is delivered, is increasing rapidly all over the world, with the effect that the cost per student is also rapidly rising. The developing world is, because of its greater poverty, less able to adapt its curriculum and methodology in these respects, and this in turn contributes to the widening of the already massive gulf between the living standards of countries in the north and in the south. It is of little use exhorting the developing countries to improve their living standards by hard work and better organisation if the modern education which should underpin these changes cannot be provided, and if the international economic order does not allow the developing countries to accumulate capital.

Moreover, the developing countries have been concerned, as we have, with attempting to come to terms with the concept of equity, and the remedying of the massive differences in the standard of living evidenced, among other ways, in differing standards of education between citizens in different parts of the same country as well as those who live in different parts of the world. It is no longer acceptable, for example, that in Britain citizens living in the north of the country should have a lower life expectation, a lower provision of health services, a lower standard of housing, and in general lower scores on every indicator of human welfare that one can easily measure. In developing countries the differences between different citizens are more dramatic than they are in Britain, with great differences between dwellers in the countryside and in the towns, and between the under-privileged and the privileged in the towns and cities themselves. In the Sudan, for example, "the infant mortality rate in southern Sudan was 170 per thousand, compared to 110 per thousand in the north. A WHO/World Bank Study of the water supply and sanitation in 1978 stated that 46 per cent of the overall Sudanese population had access to a safe water supply, but only 7 per cent in the south had such access. In 1978-
79 a Sudanese child between the ages of 7 and 13 had only a 37 per cent chance of being in school, and less than that among girls: but in the northern province 74 per cent of the children had a chance of being in school, whereas in the Bokr-el-Gahzal southern province, children had only a 12 per cent chance of being in school (girls had a 7 per cent chance).

It is important to realise that this is also a European problem. Philip Coombs has pointed out that "approximately 220 million people still live in the rural areas of OECD member nations, a number comparable to the total population of France, Germany, Italy and the U.K. combined ... Even in the more industrialised states of northern Europe and North America, as well as in Australia and New Zealand, there are still large pockets of educationally disadvantaged rural youth. The problem in most cases is not that they lack schools to attend, but that the teachers are often less qualified, the curriculum is limited, and its standardised content is so urban-biased it discourages young people from assuming leadership roles in developing their own rural environment". The educational problems of developed countries are not just those of the inner city areas.

Most commentators recognise that education, properly employed, is an invaluable and indeed essential tool in redressing the balance, yet even the most privileged countries have not yet fully understood how this tool can best be employed. In financial terms it would seem evident that positive discrimination must be applied in staffing and funding the school system, yet at a time of declining resources it is difficult to adopt this remedy.

The curriculum issues are much less widely understood; differentiation in the content of the curriculum to suit the needs of different classes of the population, though superficially attractive and, indeed, sometimes recommended in Britain, are not acceptable if they involve imprisoning the rural dweller in the countryside, the slum dweller in the inner city, and maintaining power and wealth in the hands of those who already possess them. In some cases, however, it seems difficult to educate all the citizens of a country for equality without, at the same time, educating them for revolution. It is ironic that in this country our Conservative Government is advocating the spread of economic

14 Coombs, The World Crisis in Education, p. 222.
15 Ibid., p. 219.
literacy whereas in some third world countries the teaching of
development studies, which include as their most prominent aim a
similar teaching of economic literacy, has been discontinued
because it is regarded as subversive of the existing order. Certainly
a change in the educational system is unavoidable if it is to cater
for the needs of the whole community as effectively as it now
caters for the élite, and as it tries to come to terms with the rapidly
changing technology which is now required to improve and
maintain the standard of living of the inhabitants of the planet in
the light of a rapidly increasing population. Indeed, one might say
that we are involved in a critical race between education and
catastrophe.

The importance of winning this race and the gravity of the crisis
in which the whole world is living is not generally recognised,
except spasmodically when changes occur, such as the comparatively
recent increase in the price of oil, which impact upon our
own comfort. While it is often said that the schools and the
teaching profession are conservative, it is, in fact, the population
as a whole which deserves that epithet. Governments, including
our own, bemoan "the disastrous decline in educational quality"
compared with "the good old days" when they went to school.
Philip Coombs comments, "this is not the place to ask whether
schooling ever really worked in the way claimed in an imagined
Golden Age, or whether schools have since "gone to pot" almost
beyond redemption. This is the place, however, to ask a funda-
mental question about the critics. Are they animated by a realistic
and valid concept of quality and standards, congruous with the
nature of a swift changing and greatly diversified world? ... The
fundamental issue is not whether all proposed educational chan-
ges are good or, conversely, whether all resistance to such
proposals is wrong-headed. The issue is whether in the world of
today it makes sense to perceive educational quality and standards
in terms of fixed and universal absolutes ... Thus the challenge to
educational planners and teachers today is not how to get back to
the standards, curricula and methods of the "good old days". It is
how to formulate standards and programmes that will prepare
young people to function effectively on the rapidly moving and
changing frontiers of the future".16

When outlined in this way it will be seen that the teaching

16 Ibid., p. 107.
profession is in the vanguard of the movement towards the improved education necessary in a rapidly changing and increasingly dangerous world. Yet its efforts to come to terms with the baffling questions relating to curriculum change and development are constantly impaired, not only by a denial of the funds and time which are necessary to implement change at the required rate, but also by vociferous criticisms and cries of "back, back" from those who should know a great deal better. Curriculum development is a slow and complex matter and its implementation is even more difficult, yet it lies at the very frontier of the war against poverty, hunger and violence, and should be receiving the best attention of the best brains in our country. It is only by concentrating attention and resources on these matters that the problems of unemployment, the use of leisure, the removal of the causes of drug addiction, the problems inherent in inequality, and the creation of satisfying cultural outlets for the majority of the population, can be solved. This does not imply, of course, that I am undervaluing the underlying economic causes of poverty and inequality. It does mean that unless we master the educational problems to which I am drawing attention there will not be the intellectual vigour to solve these problems, the motivation to do so, or the ability to apply the solutions in the population at large. Certainly we cannot think that such massive problems can be solved by introducing a few hours on drugs, economics or industrial awareness into the curriculum of teacher education; it is like filling sandbags with a trowel when cracks are seen in the wall of the dam towering above our homes.

Time does not permit me to deal with the massive problem of unemployment, a problem which is by no means unique to this country—indeed we have dealt with it rather better than most developed countries. It is a world-wide phenomenon which threatens the stability of virtually every country. The causes of unemployment are similar everywhere, a rapid growth of population combined with a shedding of labour by an increasingly industrialised society. The most expensive labour in the world is low-paid unskilled labour. And it is, of course, the young who suffer most. The ratio of youth to adult unemployment in OECD countries is as follows: U.K. 2.4, Australia 2.9, Canada 2.2, Finland 2.9, France 3.7, Germany 1.8, Italy 7.00, Japan 2.1, Spain 3.9, Sweden 2.3, and the United States 2.3. This is an international problem which will not just go away. We can expect a drop in
youth unemployment in the U.K. during the next few years, as the output of secondary schools drops, but the underlying cause of lower employment in industry and commerce, especially of the less well educated, will continue to grow. If problems are experienced in Britain, it is easy to imagine the problem in the big cities of the third world. Yet nowhere is the quality of research and discussion being given to this central problem which it demands.

What, then, is to be done? Ultimately the only solution to the educational crisis is a massive reorientation in attitude towards educational issues by the whole population. It must be recognised that it is sensible to spend more money on education rather than on protecting ourselves from the effects of its inadequacies. There must be a sincere and calculated attempt to encourage and support the work of teachers and educationists instead of denigrating them and making their work increasingly difficult. Teachers must be freed from the necessity of spending much of their effort on campaigning for their own standard of living, and must themselves be prepared to expend time and energy on a radical re-thinking of the nature of their work and the means by which its aims can be accomplished. A serious debate on the nature of education in a modern society must be re-opened and developed in place of the petty squabbling and party divisions with which we are currently obsessed.

This is a prescription which it is easy to make in this country and which could be implemented here by a carefully phased programme of improvement. In poorer countries it is not so easy and, indeed, is impossible of implementation without increased assistance from the richer countries. This itself cannot possibly be done on an appropriate scale unless there is a revolution in our thinking about effective ways of giving such assistance and a willingness to do this, in the interest of averting catastrophe, even if it means a halt in, or possibly a decline in, our own standard of living. The fact that this is not a political platform on to which any of our parties is willing to climb, is one of the most depressing features of the present day political scene.

One factor which might contribute to a change in the situation would be an increased emphasis on adult education. We are familiar in this country with the fact to which I have already referred, that we live in an aging country where the proportion of the older to the younger is increasing. We have not yet adapted to this situation in the same way as the United States where the
phrase "the greying of the campus" is often used to describe the effects of the ever-increasing amount of post-experience and in-service teaching done in American institutions, and the special provision which is made there for the retired. In developing countries an energetic adult education programme is often the only way in which literacy and the benefits of an improved standard of living can be conferred. It is unfortunate that in this country so many of our better educated people think of adult education exclusively in terms of flower arranging and yoga, and give little thought to the massive potential of a properly-designed adult education sector. Instead it is adult education which takes first cuts at times of financial stringency, and even the Open University, whose success and innovatory methods are widely studied and adopted by other countries, is increasingly under threat.

Another weapon in the struggle with which we are faced is the skill and experience of our educationists, and this is a weapon which is seriously under-employed. What other learned profession has as little control of the nature and development of its work as the teaching profession? Such involvement as it does have seems only too often to be mere tokenism and those bodies in which it can have an effective voice, such as the Schools Council and the Advisory Council on the Supply and Education of Teachers, are discontinued. It may be that education is too important to be left to teachers. The solution, however, is not to remove educational control more and more from the locality and to concentrate it in the hands of a few civil servants and politicians who, however admirable they may be as administrators or politicians, have generally no specific expertise in education. Rather it is to involve the entire teaching force and the population at large by constantly placing the issues before them in a massive, continuing discussion of the nature and content of education. It is decentralisation rather than centralisation which we should be pursuing at the present time. This is a matter on which some developing countries with their tradition of widespread consultation and popular support have a great deal to teach us.

I have attempted to show that the educational problems with which we are grappling in Britain are not unique to our own situation, but are causing concern on a world-wide scale. I have indicated that the crisis in education has several causes. Prominent among them is the acute world-wide shortage of teachers of the
required standard, possessing adequate skills and knowledge, a shortage which is currently increasing. An inability or unwillingness to provide the resources required exacerbates this shortage and undermines the work of existing teachers. More serious, however, is the inability of governments and peoples to solve critical social problems, relating especially to the exploitation of some countries by others, and within each country the discrepancy of living standards between different regions, between town and countryside and between inner city and suburban dwellers. Other problems are caused by an uncertainty about ethical issues which results primarily from a decline in religious beliefs with their accompanying sanctions. Society places these problems on the agenda of schools, which, since they are themselves a part of society and not remote from it, are not qualified to solve them, and consequently are regarded as failing in their most important role. This in turn leads to a disenchantment with education and to an increased reluctance to provide adequate resources and teachers for it. And parallel with this, and itself a contributory factor, is our inability to solve the basic economic problems of national and international development.

This survey of the crisis in education has, of necessity, been a sobering one. Once again our country is being threatened by our national characteristic of discounting and failing to capitalise on those things which we do best. We can perhaps cheer ourselves by reflecting on the amazing progress which we have made in our educational provision in this country and the social benefits which have accrued from it. What we have done in the past we can certainly do again, if we can only liberate the talents, abilities, knowledge and skills which still exist, in spite of their increasing dispersion. In changing direction and giving to education the priority that it deserves, we will also need to look not only at our own national advantage but at the educational progress of the whole world, and especially of the developing nations which is necessary if widespread disaster is not to overtake us. Time is not on our side. Education is vitally necessary for national wellbeing and international peace. Let us ascribe to it its proper value and give our best endeavours to a solution of the crisis in education, which is threatening not just our own comfort but the peace and security of the world.