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CONFERENCE ON EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC AND
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN LATIN AMERICA

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Santiago, Chile, 5 to 19 March 1962

PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE FIFTH PLENARY MEETING
held at the Universidad Técnica del Estado, Santiago, Chile,
on Wednesday, 7 March 1962, at 3.30 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. BARROS (Chile)

later, Mr. MACKAY (Argentina)

later, Mr. TORRES BODET (Mexico)

Rapporteur: Mr. NIETO GABALLERO (Colombia)

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9.30 a.m. on 10 March 1962.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN RELATION TO EDUCATION (continued)

Mr. LOBATO (El Salvador) began his statement with an allusion to the influence exerted by the Chilean educational tradition on education in his own country, through Chilean professors and teachers working in El Salvador. He then referred to the demographic, ecological and sociological characteristics of El Salvador, pointing to its small area, its predominantly rural population, and its high population density, as the underlying causes of the complexity of its educational, economic and social problems. From the sociological standpoint, he drew attention to the efforts to reduce disparities in the social structure. One of the most serious socio-economic problems was illiteracy, in which cause and effect merged into each other, creating a vicious circle. In 1950, the proportion of illiterate persons in the rural population aged 10 years and over had been 57.7 per cent; the records showed that 760,000 persons had been unable to read or write. By 1960, however, 150,000 had been taught to do so, which was some improvement. The school population comprised only two fifths of the children of school age. With regard to the measures adopted to train more teachers, between 1957 and 1961 the number of training schools for primary teachers had risen from thirteen to fifty, plus three established in the current year, and the number of teachers graduating from them had increased from 466 to 845 over the same period, and was expected to reach 1,000 in the course of the current year. Of primary school teachers, 35.5 per cent were unqualified, and the secondary school teachers were self-taught graduates of the training schools for primary teachers who had specialized in some particular branch of education.

The UNESCO Major Project No. 1 had undoubtedly been directly instrumental in developing primary education and teacher training in El Salvador and had also played an indirect part in raising the average level of education there. Since the inauguration of the Major

/Project in

Project in 1957 the following measures had been taken in El Salvador: reorganization of the Ministry of Education; a steady increase in the education budget; creation of a Department of Teacher Training to improve the training of primary school teachers; construction of a relatively large number of rural and urban schools; and the convening of national seminars on various aspects of education, including the Central American Seminar on Secondary Education.

Since 1951 his country could boast of a Planning Office, with planning, statistical and documents sections, set up directly under the Ministry of Education.

The objectives that El Salvador hoped to attain in the forthcoming decade in the light of its social and economic situation were: to provide complete primary education for the whole school-age population; to draw up a comprehensive school building plan for all educational levels, so as to supply the present shortage; to provide a properly trained and sufficiently large body of teachers; to lower the present illiteracy rate and develop the various community groups as much as possible, particularly those in rural areas; to raise the social and economic status of teachers so as to prevent them from abandoning the teaching profession for better paid activities, and to give them some legal guarantee of security of tenure, due promotion, etc.; to train skilled labour and the intermediate and higher cadres of specialists required for actual and projected development plans; to promote agricultural education and train a larger number of specialists in that important field; and to reorganize plans and programmes on an integrated basis at all educational levels.

Mr. HART (Cuba) said that his country's participation in the Conference was particularly significant at the present time, since Cuba considered itself to be the repository of the best American traditions and was impelled to reiterate its eagerness to exchange views on the topics under discussion with the Governments and peoples of Latin America, to which it was linked by indissoluble ties. Although the reigning philosophy in Cuba was clearly defined and gave education its stamp, the fact that a great educational evolution had taken place and had

/achieved positive

achieved positive results, however small their scale, made it desirable to proffer some information on them and thereby co-operate on a high level for the benefit of the Latin American peoples.

The fact that at the Punta del Este Conference - to the recommendations of which several of the topics under discussion were closely related - education had been acknowledged to be an essential requisite for the under-privileged masses of America was, in his opinion, a great victory. It was vital to see to it that those masses advanced towards a high level of education, and the UNESCO Major Project No. 1 established in 1957 was one important step in that direction. Another was the ten-year plan for the development of education approved at Punta del Este. Cuba was in an unusually satisfactory position in that respect, since it had complied in essence with the basic provisions of the plan set forth by UNESCO in 1957 and had taken steps to implement the plan of Punta del Este. The Cuban school system catered free of charge for the entire primary and secondary school-age population as well as for those of an age to receive vocational training; and even the universities were open to everyone. Education was absolutely and genuinely free, a large number of scholarships being available for secondary and higher education to that end. Since January 1959, in fact, the effort put forth to develop education in Cuba had been among the most important in Latin America. Cuba had of course its educational problems, but they were no longer of a quantitative nature, being rather concerned with quality and aim. They were being tackled in the light of the ideology underlying the organization of a Socialist society.

He went on to describe the various stages of the educational campaign in Cuba. Prior to 1959 the illiteracy rate had been 23 per cent, and half the school-age population had been unable to obtain any kind of education. The Ministry of Education had been a centre of administrative, moral and spiritual corruption. In January 1959, with the triumph of the revolution, venal politicians and inspectors in sinecure posts had had to be removed from the Ministry in order to put the educational services on a healthy, scientific and dignified footing. The Ministry's budget had been raised

from 58 million pesos in 1959 to 270 million in 1962 concurrently with the nationalization of private schools, thus enabling sweeping reforms to be undertaken, school enrolment to be increased by 78 per cent, and more than 500,000 additional classrooms to be made available for mass education, which, incidentally, included workers' trade unions and rural co-operatives, with the help of the students. The reforms were not confined to primary education but covered secondary education and technical, industrial and commercial training as well. Teacher training was likewise free of charge. It was organized on a regional basis and was currently focused on the special training of teachers for adult education. The three universities of Havana, Santiago and Las Villas, well organized, would suffice to cover Cuba's requirements in so far as higher education was concerned, since there were more scholarships available than students qualified to take proper advantage of them. In short, access to education in Cuba was limited solely by the level of school attendance of the masses, in its turn a legacy from the past. If the data he had given seemed exaggerated, anyone was at liberty to pay a visit to Cuba and see for himself.

After referring to the extensive system of State scholarships and the use of the expropriated homes of the wealthy classes as school premises, he turned to the question of adult education and the literacy campaign. The latter, which had begun in 1956-58 in the heart of the Sierra Maestra, amid the clash of arms, had been intensified after the success of the revolution, when the rebel army could turn its attention to the rudiments of reading and writing; and it acquired a national character later, thanks to the assistance of volunteer teachers organized by the National Institute for Agrarian Reform - who extended it to the country districts - and to friendly rivalry between the municipalities. The campaign reached its peak in 1961, having enjoyed the participation of all the State agencies, the trade unions, international organizations and numerous volunteers from other parts of the American continent, under the technical direction of the Ministry of Education. By that year it could be said that illiteracy had been virtually eliminated in Cuba, since the illiteracy index dropped to 3.9 per cent, /including the

including the Haitian workers, whose ignorance of Spanish excluded them from the campaign, and the mentally unfit. In achieving that result, which had been made possible by the national character of the campaign and the mobilization of the masses to carry it out, a minimum of technical equipment had been used, namely the preparation of a code and manual and the taking of the relevant censuses.

Three mass movements were currently carrying on the follow-up campaign - the in-service training of workers and the task of providing a minimum basis of technical education. By those means, the results of the literacy campaign would be consolidated, access to secondary education would be promoted, and greater productivity of labour as a factor of production would be encouraged. Current aims were to improve the professional qualifications of primary, secondary and pre-university teachers, through the Higher Institute of Education; to eliminate primary school wastage, by getting rid of the economic factors which caused it; to lower the teacher-pupil ratio from 1:40 to 1:35; to make access to secondary, technical and university education easier; to train more primary school teachers and educational leaders; and to complete the integrated reform of primary education by September 1962.

In his view, educational planning should be subject to political guidance. There could be no conflict between technique and politics if the latter were interpreted as the projection of the free and well-rounded development of personality under socialism, with the support of technique and science. After drawing a distinction between the technical and pedagogical and the economic planning of education, and describing the administrative organization pertinent to each, he said that the integration of education programmes with economic and social development was ensured in Cuba by virtue of the participation of specialists and general public alike, which meant that the process had genuinely democratic backing. The implementation of the programmes was based on a system of decentralization by regions, under State guidance.

The ideological elements in education, in his view, had always been the product of the classes in power at the time. In Cuba today they were
/simply expressions

simply expressions of the desire to make education more thorough and raise the level of knowledge attained; to give it a moral content, at once negative, i.e. inspired by the struggle against the exploitation of man by man, and positive and creative, i.e. imbued with the socialist spirit of emulation in the pursuit of collective aims; and to link teaching to productive labour by adopting dialectic materialism as the basis of its methodology.

Reading out the message sent by the Ministry of Education of Cuba to the student centres, in line with the foregoing principles, and the second Havana declaration on the state of education in Latin America, he maintained that social reform was the outcome of economic change and was reflected in the educational situation. Matters of economic concern should take precedence over educational affairs, though the two were not irreconcilable; but that whole argument was mere academic hair-splitting, and the question should be envisaged from a more realistic standpoint. The fact was that under the existing economic system the cost of education simply could not be defrayed in Latin America, while at the same time, the solution of the educational problem throughout the region was a matter that brooked no delay.

In his eagerness to co-operate in the search for a solution that would benefit manual and agricultural workers - under-privileged classes in the real sense which were the mainspring of social reform and should be the primary concern of the present Conference - he proposed to put forward concrete proposals inspired by the example of his own country. To put the matter briefly, the urgent need was to ascertain how much it would cost to place education on a sound footing in Latin America. There UNESCO could be helpful; but the next inevitable step was to find means of financing the expenditure involved. Cuba had done so by nationalizing the sources of production, but that might not be a satisfactory solution for other countries. In any event, the funds obtainable through the Alliance for Progress were insufficient. Resources would therefore have to be procured by means of heavy taxation on the large foreign monopolies, so that their profits, instead of being remitted abroad, might be used

/for financing

for financing education in the Latin American countries. At the same time, loans might be obtained from all those countries in the world that were willing to give help without political strings attached.

Those were the solutions devised by Cuba; they might perhaps not be applicable in other countries, and discussion of them would be inopportune on the present occasion. They were not mere technical changes; they were bred of the triumph of the revolution, and there was no suggestion of imposing them on anyone. But he had felt it his personal duty to report upon them at the present Conference, and to reaffirm, in face of the scepticism that might exist in some quarters, the sincerity of what he had said and, in short, his conviction that the fundamental educational problem could be solved only by revolution, as it had been solved in Cuba.

The meeting was suspended at 6.50 p.m. and resumed at 7.15 p.m. under the chairmanship of Mr. MacKay (Argentina), who was replaced shortly afterwards by Mr. Torres Bodet (Mexico).

Mr. BROHIM (Netherlands) said that the two parts of the Kingdom of the Netherlands situated in the Western Hemisphere - Surinam and the Netherlands Antilles - had been autonomous for the past fifteen years; they enjoyed complete independence in their internal affairs and therefore had full control of education.

With respect to Surinam, several problems required early solution. First, the population was growing at an annual rate of over 3.5 per cent, the increase in the school-age population being estimated at between 6 and 7 per cent annually. Huge sums would therefore have to be spent on teacher training and school construction. Secondly, the population of Surinam was composed of several ethnic groups, each speaking a different language. The language problem had been a serious obstacle to the establishment of a homogeneous educational structure. However, research had shown that the problem could be overcome by having children attend nursery school for two years, during which they were taught the official school language - Dutch. Two years at a nursery school prior to elementary education was at present considered an essential part of /primary education

primary education in Surinam. If made compulsory, it would obviously increase the shortage of school-rooms and teachers. Thirdly, there was an urgent need for expansion of lower and higher-level vocational training. Fourthly, the teacher shortage produced by the high rate of population growth had had to be met by lowering educational standards; that might affect the quality of teaching.

With regard to education in the Netherlands Antilles, 26 per cent of the total population of the six islands attended the various educational institutions, in spite of the fact that school attendance was not compulsory. About 40 per cent of the budget was allocated to general and vocational training.

Assistance was rendered by the Netherlands to education in Latin America in the form of help given at the request of Latin American countries under the Netherlands Technical Assistance Programme, contributions by Dutch private enterprises to the development of education and vocational training in Latin America, visits to the Netherlands by groups of Latin Americans for the purpose of acquainting them with local educational systems, and the provision of scholarships. Experts from the Netherlands were also sent to Surinam and the Netherlands Antilles to assist them with their economic and social development programmes.

The present Conference was further proof of the growing awareness of the contribution which education could make to economic and social development, and of the fact that expenditure on education could produce returns which, while perhaps difficult to measure, were nevertheless real and could not be neglected. It was also realized that expansion of education should be carefully planned and related to a country's economic and social development. A given level and composition of the national product required an adequate supply of manpower at different levels of training. The time factor was of paramount importance in the planning of education and led to complications in teacher training. Financial limitations, too, should be taken into account, and optimum use should be made of the resources available, by means of equitable distribution to agriculture, the manufacturing industries, communications, education and other activities. There was an urgent need for criteria /which would

which would permit a comparison of the cost and return of investment in each of those sectors. In that connexion, the techniques of educational planning could be further improved, since accurate criteria which would allow a country to decide on the amount it should spend on education and to measure the return on its educational expenditure were as yet unavailable. Research should therefore be undertaken on an increasing scale into such subjects as existing techniques of educational planning, the gathering of information on labour requirements by level of training in relation to the volume of production for the various economic sectors, and the extent to which a relative increase in enrolment ratios would lead to a decline in the return on education. Such studies could be based on the experience and information available in the Latin American countries and possibly other areas. They would not be merely academic; they would be of considerable practical value to those responsible for social and educational planning.

The meeting rose at 7.45 p.m.