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MUSIC

O.F. SIG. TUNE

COCHRANE

Hello again. Well so far all our tenth anniversary reports have come from the south, but most regions are having their own celebrations too. We heard that Liverpool OUSA had organised an event so we asked Josie Smith to investigate.

(MUSIC IN BACKGROUND)

SMITH

Liverpool OUSA have been celebrating the tenth anniversary of the Open University with a buffet dance. Two local M.P.s were there; the member for Preston South and the Member for Huyton, who was to be the guest speaker. During a quiet piece from the band, I had an opportunity to talk to Sir Harold Wilson and I began by asking him how important he thought the OU was as an agent for change in society.

WILSON

I think tremendously; far beyond all my hopes and dreams when, you know, when I first decided that my own Government were going to have take it whether they liked it or not. I think it has been, it has done most of the things I hoped for, and a lot of the things I never dreamed about. The things I hoped for was to give a second chance; especially, going back a few years, people who have been through the War, and might have gone to an established university, pre-established university, but it's the imagination shown by everyone; I've known them all, I mean the Chancellors and Vice Chancellors especially, and it has really gone far beyond any of our earlier dreams.

SMITH

Does the impact on the world surprise you, the way in which universities are asking for OU material from all over the world?

at

WILSON

Not/all. Indeed this started very early, and what's more it's not just a question of material, it's a question of all the new technological methods used, like for printing, new methods of printing books, printing art-forms, and things of that kind. And what has thrilled me going around, for example I was in Texas at the invitation of the late President Johnson after he had retired, and the Head of the university, an enormous university, only wanted to know one thing and he called a big meeting about the OU. Now of course it's starting in Texas. I was in Israel. I'd been there one hour, would I go and talk to them and now we've got the Everyman University.

WILSON
CONT'D.

And now there are 30 universities created in the image of ours. Many of them with local characteristics obviously.

SMITH

And that is in ten years?

WILSON

That is in just over ten years, yes.

SMITH

So what of the future? And how do you see the OU developing?

WILSON

The immediate thing now is defences. I mean to stop vandals, and Goths, and all kinds of people from cutting it back. I had to face that mind you when I started, my own Chancellor of the Exchequer wouldn't have it, then the Prime Minister has to still push. And then when we got into opposition there's a story that the Conservatives, Mrs. Thatcher's Education was going to cut it back. To her credit she did not, and any ideas were successfully reduced to do that. I think for a moment the role must be in a defensive role but I hope it will be aggressively defensive.

/Minister for

SMITH

Sir Harold Wilson before supper. After the buffet came the speeches. Sir Harold started his speech saying that he'd done quite a bit before he came about the OU - one son works for it, and the other son's within half a credit of his degree, and the whole thing was his idea anyway back in 1962. But he'd learnt during the evening that the OU was not so much an educational institution as a way of life. He closed on a serious note, talking about conversations he'd had with students at York at another OUSA meeting.

WILSON

And I asked them because I was fascinated and I'd really like to ask all of you how they managed - rising at 6 a.m., working late at night while still doing a full-time job? And some explained that they went hard at it to finish the course in the minimum time, often being seduced thereafter to go in for another course. I think a number I've heard from tonight. Others particularly those with family responsibilities will take a sabbatical year off, and then resume the course, or vary it perhaps, with a little more variety. But what struck me that night as never before was their dedication. I couldn't help feeling and saying that if I were an employer in industry, commerce, public or private enterprise, if I had to interview people to take on for staff, I would be tempted to be biased in favour of recruiting Open University students, less for any technical qualifications they might even be in the process of earning, but for their proof of dedication and responsibility, their willingness and their ability to absorb new ideas and to meet new intellectual challenges in the course of each day's study. In other words it is, I won't say a race of supermen or superwomen, but I think we have created something here going far beyond the ordinary standards of the old established universities.

Cont'd/.....

COCHRANE

And that report by Josie Smith.

Now back in the office your messages and letters have been getting through to us, and certainly our programme on deregistration spurred you into action, like this lady who rang us from Wales.

STUDENT

As a very mature student, who finds examinations to be a problem owing to nervous apprehension, I get resits. Up until now I have not been unduly worried as I have enjoyed doing the course and assignments, and although I did not enter the OU with the main object of passing exams and getting the degree, but a carrot dangling is quite an incentive to intensive study. I have enjoyed the courses and I have only had one F during all my assignments with a C average. Now I'm faced with eviction when the OU is very important to my state of mind; to have deep concentration in the subject is vital to take one's mind off morbid thoughts. But now alas the OU has decided no exam pass and out. I thought this was contrary to the aims of Miss Jennie Lee; it was for the benefit of the enlargement of the mind, and the growth of the person as an individual, to widen one's horizon. But if they throw out these policies adopted the OU will become just an exam, certificate and degree brigade, and in the main occupied by training college teachers, with three credit exemptions before they start, with their main purpose of getting a headship in their schools.

I agree that drop-outs are a problem and an expense to the OU, but if a student has worked hard and done all her assignments with a required standard, but through age, attitude, or nervous approach, finds it difficult to concentrate and draw her best out of her exams, she is out. I would like your opinion on cases like mine.

COCHRANE

Well lady from Wales there's a gentleman from Devon who agrees with you.

STUDENT

It would be unfair to deregister students, who for valid reasons, are not making fast progress. In my case I have failed a course because of being unable to get to distant tutorials, missed a year because of pressure at work, and missed a year due to ill-health.

On other other hand I have never dropped out, I have completed 95% of assignments, and always attended summer school, and sat the exams. Despite slow progress I have a sincere desire to continue studies.

I hope that the subject will be carefully considered before students like myself are cut off.

COCHRANE

But an opposing view came from a lady in Essex.

Cont'd/.....

STUDENT

I think one of the great advantages of taking a formal course of study is the pressure to keep to a schedule and complete the course undertaken to a required standard. Once a student gets off schedule, he or she is on a very slippery slope, and it is in the student's own interest to be fully committed to successful completion.

Obviously there would be extenuating circumstances, and in exceptional cases, I think, these could be presented to the tutor counsellor. After all it's a great privilege to have a second chance or late chance to do a university course, and there is a great deal of latitude in choice of courses, and how many years over which one spreads the degree. I think that some fairly strict standards must be maintained to give a proper value to the degree when it is attained.

COCHRANE

And it's that last view that got the approval of Senate earlier this month, but don't worry the system does have its safeguards and no-one will be deregistered without a great deal of investigation.

And now for a rather novel idea from Colleen Gorman in Oxford.

GORMAN

I brought forward an idea at the Oxford OUSA AGM which will probably need some publicity to stimulate a more general discussion on it. I suggested that if a student following a full credit course, which requires six TMAs and an examination, is unable to produce all the TMAs but completes four of them successfully, and passes the examination requirement, then that should entitle him or her to a half credit. This would enable students to finish the course with a half credit if they only ^{had} four or five TMAs rather than possibly withdrawing and not receiving anything - and also they would move through the system a half credit faster.

When I decided to do "School and Society" it was a half credit course and, as I still wanted to do it when it was upgraded to a full credit, I decided to do it and forgo the credit. Now I understand that the Education course team are reconsidering the valuation of their courses, with a view to having a full credit foundation course, and possibly following on with half credit courses. They find, however, that most students prefer a full credit course. Not only is it desirable for students to have a choice, but if my suggestion were taken up as a general practice, far more students would have a greater degree of choice. They could, to some extent, choose the 'value' of a credit course for themselves. This would present a challenge to the Education course team in particular, which purports to be radical in its views, to see if they would adopt a conservative position if presented with a request for change to a more flexible procedure.

COCHRANE

How's that for a challenge. Now if you're feeling hard-done-by as an OU student, here's some words of encouragement from Susan Martyr, an undergraduate at a conventional university.

Cont'd/.....

MARTYR

There seems to be some concern among OU students that they have little time for reading around their subjects. As a first year student on a science course at an ordinary university, I also found this. There was such a range of topics raised during lectures that for most I read only my lecture notes, and perhaps a standard text book; some areas I decided not to follow up, and others, disappointingly few, I followed up in a more specialist text. But I used the library little in my first year. It may be reassuring to OU students that great pressure on time is a general aspect of university courses, and they should not be distressed if they have not time to browse in a library.

In later years, with more specialisation, there was more freedom, in particular to read around one's own project subject. Maybe this greater freedom occurs also in higher level OU courses - I hope so. There is an aspect of studying with the OU that is different. When an OU student reads his published material for the first time, that is almost equivalent to attending a lecture; perhaps one should not expect to comprehend it all at that stage; when he reads that material again, it's like reading one's lecture notes, with the important difference that lecture notes represent the result of how well the lecturer expressed the subject on the day, the student's comprehension of what was said, and his ability to write it down briefly. There may consequently be less likelihood of there being totally incomprehensible passages in the OU material than in lecture notes, so perhaps less need for the OU student to read other texts.

COCHRANE

Well thank you Susan Martyr. It's nice to hear an outsider's point of view. Next week we're on the road again, for another Study Centre Special - this time from St. Austell in Cornwall. Until then - goodbye.

MUSIC

O.F. SIG. TUNE : Jubilee Fanfare

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