

Open Forum 24 (1979)

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Josie Smith:

Liverpool OUSA have been celebrating the tenth anniversary of The Open University with a buffet dance. Two local MPs 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.

Harold Wilson:

I think tremendously. Far beyond all my hopes and dreams when, you know when I first decided that my then Government were going to have to 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 things I never dreamed about. The things I hoped for were to give a second chance, especially going back a few years, people who have been through the War, who 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 the Vice Chancellors especially, and has really, sort of 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?

Wilson:

Not at 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 it, 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 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 it 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. And there are now thirty 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.