

Open Forum 6 (1974)

Producer: Roger Tucker

Contributors: James Barber, Harold Wilson.

James Barber:

Prime Minister, first congratulations on your honorary degree.

Harold Wilson:

Thank you.

James Barber:

Is, you know, over the period you've had many honours heaped upon you, is there any way in which an Open University honorary degree will stand out?

Harold Wilson:

Yes it's very special because it's at the beginning, and of the conferment, not of the first graduates but of the first of the main stream of graduates as the Vice Chancellor said, they are the first of the many, and I felt very proud to be with them, and to see so many from, I won't say from all over the country because, quite rightly, these ceremonies have been done by region, but over a very wide area of the North.

James Barber:

Mr Wilson, you were in at the birth of the University, in fact you've, it's been suggested you were its father. You've also seen it now grow and establish itself and it's well accepted within the educational field generally, but let's look to the future, what sort of role do you see it playing in the future development of education in this country?

Harold Wilson:

Can I say first it's gone far beyond even my wildest dreams. I did the first outline plan of it one Easter Sunday morning in 1963. I'd been studying abroad some ideas I was playing with. I wasn't even Leader of the Party, the Opposition then, but by this time in 1963 I'd become. I'd come back from Chicago where I was studying this when Hugh Gaitskill died. And after church that morning I wrote the outline plan. It seemed to be daring to those who heard it when I made it in a speech, in fact from the outset those who planned it, the organising committee, and then the kind of shadow administration of the University were much more daring than I'd been. For example, I hadn't dared to suggest that it should award its own degrees, but should work with other universities perhaps collectively for that purpose. And, but since then of course it's become wider and deeper. The local emphasis, particularly the tutors and the local groups and I've met some, I think is exciting and they're forming a life of their own now, the local groups of course and becoming clubs and associates, travelling abroad, and even children's clubs associated with them, I think has been most exciting and of course the fact that it's developed into such an enormous international body. That is what I hoped for, I hoped it would be sending material overseas especially to under-developed countries and it's doing this on an enormous scale. Everywhere I go in the world they want to know about The Open University and I'm very proud to be asked.