

## **Open Forum 24 (1977)**

**Producer: Roger Tucker**

**Contributor: Harold Wilson**

### **Harold Wilson:**

There are of course a number of claimants of those who said they founded The Open University. I can only give you the facts. That wasn't meant to be funny, I don't know how... not how I wrote it anyway.

I was in fact working on the idea before I was elected leader of my party and Leader of the Opposition in February 1963. It was sparked off strangely because I was interested on a number of visits to the Soviet Union, after my trade agreement with them of 1947, in some of their own arrangements for higher education. But I hasten to add, The Open University is not based on what they do. Indeed on my, sort of, State Visit there in February 1975 I spent some time with Mr Kosygin telling him about the OU here, how it functioned, its purpose and what I thought they ought to learn from it before they got left behind in the rush of other countries picking it up. It was at the Bolshoi Ballet, and they have a custom there if one of the top Russians is there that between acts you go behind and you have a complete meal, I mean divided, depending on how many intervals there are into two or three. And you tend to get talking, eating and drinking, you go back and you get a very ironic clap from the audience who've been waiting forty minutes for the next thing. And it was on one of these occasions at the Bolshoi that night, that I told him about the OU and I said that I would like formally to invite him formally to send his Minister of Higher Education over to see what we had created and this occurred and the Minister did in fact did come over and I saw him.