

COMMENT

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A MESSAGE FROM THE RIGHT HON. ANTHONY EDEN, M.C., M.P. (President of the Federation)



THE RIGHT HON. ANTHONY EDEN,
M.C., M.P.

In the four years since the General Election Conservatism has made great progress in the Universities, and it is significant that under the first Socialist government which has held power with a Parliamentary majority, young people in the Universities are, in increasing numbers, rejecting Socialism as a political creed.

The Conservative Party has always valued its membership among University students. I find it very encouraging that several of those who were members of the Universities' Federation since the war have now been adopted as Parliamentary candidates.

We must not, however, be complacent.

The coming months must be critical for our nation. At the beginning of the academic year I send you my best wishes, as the President of the Universities' Federation, for the success of your recruiting drive for membership.

A strong and vigorous representation of our Party in the Universities would be a stimulating message of encouragement to us all.

Anthony Eden

FACTS ABOUT THE FEDERATION

The Federation of University Conservative Associations is a body that now has a membership of about 4,500. Its Executive Committee has recently been given the status of an Advisory Committee to the Conservative Party, and it maintains a link with the Conservative Central Office through its Secretary, who is an official of the Conservative Political Centre. Its purpose is to provide a forum whereby the views of university Conservatives can be expressed to the Party. It also aims to co-ordinate the activities of the Conservative University Associations as follows:—

1. It organises an annual conference at which representatives attend from each University and at which resolutions on National policy are debated and commissions discuss current problems.
2. Regional conferences are held to discuss problems of organisation.
3. The Federation maintains contact with foreign students of

like political views and encourages exchange visits between English students and students from abroad.

4. The Federation organises in co-operation with the Principal of Swinton, the Conservative College of the North, a weekly course each year for undergraduates.
5. If you are a member of a University Conservative Association which does not organise teams to tour constituencies to speak and canvass during the vacation, you can join the panel of speakers which is run from the Conservative Political Centre and this will enable you to maintain contact with current opinion in the country and at the same time will give you invaluable electioneering experience. If you are interested in this kind of work, you should apply through the Secretary of your Association who will give your name to Miss B. L. Turner, the Universities Secretary at the Conservative Political Centre.

UNIVERSITIES FOR EVERYONE : DEMOCRACY OR SNOBBERY ?

RUSSELL KIRK

(St. Andrews)

"EDUCATION" in our time comprehends a multitude of tasks, most of them half-evaded in our schools and universities. But whatever else education be, almost all educated people are likely to agree that its grand aim is to make civilised men and women out of young human beings. In this decade, both Britain and America have echoed to the cry that education must be "democratic"—viz., that everyone ought to have more of it. Now, whether democracy and wisdom are everywhere synonymous, a good many of us might debate. But we need not enter upon that discussion ; for I am inclined to think that the left-wing demand for university education for everyone, or nearly everyone, is the child not of democracy but of snobbery.

In America, Mr. Benjamin Fine (who writes numerous "progressive" books on schooling) wants *everyone* sent to a university, and presumably compelled to remain ; I am not sure he exempts even congenital idiots, or admits the existence of such. In Britain, manipulation by elements of the Left has got the National Union of Students to endorse a similarly extravagant proposal, with grants for everybody and fees for nobody ; and the number of university students is to be tripled in no time by these conjurors. What educational equalitarians on both sides of the Atlantic forget is that enrolment at an alleged university, or even a degree, is not identical with genuine education. If we try to educate all, we end by educating none. Yet sometimes one is inclined to believe that proponents of mass-production of degrees are perfectly aware of this sad dilemma—and don't give a hoot. For what they—and, alas, many students already in the universities—really want is not civilisation, but simply degrees. Are they democrats ? Or are they snobs ?

In American colleges, it is clear by this time that the bulk of the students (a vast bulk, in that nation of seven hundred institutions of higher learning) are avowedly and unashamedly there for the snob-value of a university degree. The degree will give them a species of social prestige, an easy familiarity with the ways of fraternity-houses and Union dances, possibly a snob-job with a corporation. This intellect-stifling fog of snob-value has not yet wholly enveloped the British universities, but it impends. Perhaps those of us who think the civilising mission of the university superior to the snob-mission may save the day even yet.

Intellectual Charlatans

A university bulging with intellectual charlatans of students, young people who have come along for the ride, callow youths who think a degree is assurance of a white-collar job—such a university has not time nor money for the purpose of civilising. The atmosphere of such a place is repugnant to the civilised man. He is likely to stroll away to a decent, distant corner—and there, after some lapse of time, to set up the old sort of university once more, although he may give it a new name, so that it may elude the vigilance of the seekers after snob-value. Meanwhile, the university degree may

have become so vulgar a thing that its snob-value is nearly eradicated ; and so the truly persevering snob must make his way into universities with ancient names, or accumulate advanced degrees, if he is to elevate himself above his fellow-participants in "democratic" education.

There are many people who never should attend a university. Some of them are too brilliant and too active ; the cloister would only tarnish them. Others are interested chiefly in material aggrandisement, a most understandably and sometimes socially commendable aim ; and enrolling at a university is consummate folly if one wants plump bank-balances. Others are admirably qualified for a variety of skills and techniques, without which the modern world could not endure ; but they would be happier, and the world better served, if they were encouraged to pursue their natural bent and to leave to others the rather vague business of perpetuating civilisation. Yet others are insufferable snobs ; and as many snobs as possible should be kept *out* of the universities, for this is a democratic age, and successful democracy and triumphant snobbery are incompatible.

The Ideal

The ideal body of students is a proper compound of diligent scholars, gay dogs, proletarian strivers, sons of millionaires, budding politicians, lanky athletes. This compound is ideal because it is a miniature of Society ; it teaches young men the way the world works. To substitute for it a phalanx of 'teen-age Dryasdusts, recruited by standardised examinations, uniformly remunerated, uniformly instructed, would be to destroy the charm and practical effect of that delicate blend which is university education. Or to substitute for it an incoherent mob of social-climbers, intent upon getting through educational formalism to which not genuine talent nor parental affection nor personal amicability entitle them, would be no less disastrous.

The observer of the American panorama knows that mass-education in the universities there has passed its climax, even though student bodies still swell monstrously. For already the snob-value of a degree is lessened in the United States : what nearly everyone can have, almost no one wants very much. Professors and students in America who really prize learning and civilisation have generally given up university-education as a foundered vessel ; and, shrugging, they are turning to other means for the attainment of the true ends of education—to the revival of old curricula and sounder methods, as at St. John's or Chicago, or to work in "graduate schools" which really fulfill the function of the old, pre-equalitarian college. If Britain is determined to follow the American example and grant degrees to everyone as a matter of natural right, she may find it wise simply to confer upon each infant, at christening, the degree of doctor of laws—and so save the universities from the snobs.